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TOWARDS A REVISED DEFINITION OF NATURALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The term naturalism has been used variously in literary criticism since Emile Zola adopted it a century ago. It can mean, for example, the faithful reproduction of reality without artistic refinement, the portrayal of man's animal instincts, the treatment of working-class subjects, pessimistic determinism, and the power of heredity or the environment over the individual. A work of fiction which exhibits one or more of these qualities may be regarded as naturalistic by some of its commentators. Evidently the term lacks precision.

It is the primary intention of the present study to urge a revised definition of the concept of literary naturalism, a definition that springs from a particular perception of the rôle of physical nature in nineteenth-century European and American fiction. The Introduction and Chapter One elaborate on this definition, which the following discussions support with evidence from Gothic literature, American romanticism, and the fiction of Zola and his successors in America at the turn of the century. Chapters Four and Five respond to the conventional wisdom about naturalism, that it descends from and is even a kind of realism, and that it constitutes a "school" of writers and ideas under the leadership of Zola.

In fact, the purpose of this project should perhaps be viewed as twofold: not only to advance and defend a fresh definition of naturalism, but also, secondarily, to establish the inadequacy of other definitions and assumptions.

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INTRODUCTION

> Mon Dieu! oui, je n'ai rien inventé, pas même le mot naturalisme.
>
> Emile Zola (XIV, 510)[1]

This thesis was inspired by a reading of Zola's fiction. I was, above all, struck by the recurrent images of a vitally powerful nature, by the vision of a world in which the lives of men and women are at the mercy of inexorable physical forces. The artist's imagination seemed to be obsessed with the violence of human instinct and the energy of the landscape. Oddly enough, most thematic criticism of Zola has put less emphasis on his view of man's primitive bond with nature than on his social purpose. But the theme of nature appeared all the more compelling to me not only because of the critical neglect which it has suffered but also in the light of my experience of certain other nineteenth-century writers, who assuredly bear comparison with Zola. For, like him, Tieck, Hoffmann, Poe, Hawthorne, Crane, Norris, and Dreiser--to mention some of the names which figure prominently in the present enterprise--offer us more than a glimpse of amoral physical nature, beyond human control. Having arrived at this perception, I felt easily drawn towards the argument that, for

all their differences, such artists might be united in one tradition, one common strain of thought. Here then was the true naturalism, and conceivably the most rewarding context for the study of Zola.

With the term naturalism we shall inevitably have problems. Its use in literary applications has arisen from Zola's adoption of it in the 1870s and 80s to define his ideas about the object of fiction.[2] So while we may recognise, as I insist we do, that Zola was no mere reflex of fashion, that he presides over a natural world of fatality where heroic discipline is almost impossible to maintain, we should also be aware that he played the very public rôle of theorist and propagandist. To avoid radical confusion we must enforce a distinction between the two Zolas, between theory and practice. The trouble with Zola, of course, is that he did theorize altogether too much about his craft, advertised himself, and never assumed that discreet silence which we have grown accustomed to admire in great artists. His occasional attempts to introduce theories of physiological determinism into Les Rougon-Macquart are naively conceived and often clumsily executed, as when the narrator of La Joie de vivre surprises us by explaining Pauline's sudden cruelty to the family dog in terms of some atavism passing through the maternal side of her ancestry. But fortunately Zola's theoretical pronouncements did not absolutely subvert the aesthetic integrity of any one of his novels. We know, however, that he did have a commanding influence on the

so-called "Groupe de Médan," which formed about him in the 1870's and culminated with the publication in 1880 of Les Soirées de Médan. Professing allegiance to naturalistic aims, it included such promising writers as Maupassant and Huysmans, as well as lesser figures like Alexis, Céard, and Hennique. The group, with other assorted followers, predictably disintegrated under the pressure of imaginations that would not yield to discipline, and its members soon went their own ways: for example, Maupassant to the genre of the conte, Huysmans to decadentism and the foot of the cross. Nevertheless, the model of Zola, understood as a challenge to reigning aesthetic or social orthodoxies, inspired and encouraged writers in France and many other countries. For better or worse, he holds a very important place in the history of literature.

By emphasising his detachability from the vogue of naturalism, by emphasising the distinction of his practice from his theory, I hope to give support to the belief that Zola is not the fountainhead of the phenomenon, that his fiction participates in a general current of literature and ideas in the nineteenth century which we are entitled to call naturalism. My purpose in this project is to define the concept of naturalism in and beyond the context of Zola, with an eye to the sense in which disparate writers from the Gothic fantasts to Dreiser may be reconciled. This is a much broader than usual perspective on naturalism, but one which will perhaps yield a fresh and workable definition.

The task is well worthwhile. For hitherto (so at least it seems to me) views of naturalism have not always corresponded faithfully to one's total experience of the fiction. It would be hard, for example, to justify the generalisation of Gustave Lanson, who, in his preface to Emile Bouvier's celebrated La Bataille réaliste, declares the naturalist's principles of "artistic conscience" as follows: "haine du bourgeois, mépris de la civilisation industrielle, du travail utile et de la vie regulière, sympathie pour les déclassés, les excentriques, les refractaires et les nomades."[3] Other commentators have been kinder to naturalism yet no less concise. C.F. Ramuz states simply that "l'homme pour Zola et pour ses disciples est scientifiquement déterminé."[4] The strong element of determinism, scientific or otherwise, in works commonly called naturalistic has convinced many critics that this is the characteristic which naturalism imposes on realism. According to George J. Becker, "naturalism is no more than an emphatic and explicit philosophical position taken by some realists, showing man caught in a net from which there can be no escape and degenerating under these circumstances; that is, it is pessimistic materialistic determinism."[5] Philip Rahv, for his part, agrees on the importance of overwhelming determinism and stresses its environmental origin: "I would classify as naturalistic that type of realism in which the individual is portrayed not merely as subordinate to his background but as wholly determined by it--that type of realism, in other words, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero."[6]

The notion of naturalism in alliance with realism, as its extension or offshoot, is a very pervasive one in modern scholarship. Northrop Frye thus expresses a far from uncommon point of view when he considers naturalism "the extreme of realism."[7] It is the furthest reach of representational art, aiming towards documentary exposition, the faithful record of natural facts. Acknowledging "its materialism, its determinism, its disregard for decorum, its brutality," William C. Frierson insists above all on the "fact-finding" quality of naturalism.[8] And Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine similarly assume the dominance of the factual: "Naturalism is clearly in consonance with the mood of the age which it reflects in its overwhelming emphasis on facts. The naturalists believed that the truthfulness for which they aimed could be gained only from a painstaking observation of reality and careful notation of fact."[9] A more satisfyingly original attitude to the role of facts comes from Haskell Block, who claims that the naturalist uses documentary matter only to transform it into art and that by studying such a transformation we may recognise the aesthetic value of the fiction. This effort, he suggests, will "help to point the way to a redefinition of literary naturalism."[10]

Although he points the way, Block does not himself go along it. In effect, we are still in need of a good comprehensive definition, a definition that will not revolve simply around one or another aspect of naturalistic fiction, its determinism or its documentary realism. We need a definition that would not be drawn

merely from "Le Roman expérimental," that would not be afraid of some excluding and including. In a recent survey of the état présent of naturalism studies Sigfrid Hoefert underscores such a desideratum, asserting that there are very few critical works which treat the subject as an international occurrence.[11] The only longer analyses he can find are those by Furst and Skrine and Block. Neither of these books, while they are prepared to accept naturalism as a broad movement of literature and ideas, brings it to a fresh definition. They would only be so bold as to concede that "naturalism succeeded where it seemed to fail, where it . . . outstripped its own intentions."[12]

Indeed, it did fail to fulfil its programmatic purpose, as readers of Zola's fiction would doubtless agree. Perhaps the time has come to define what purpose, acknowledged or not, it could fulfil. Our revised definition, therefore, must proceed from direct experience of the fiction, that of Zola certainly, but also of other writers, not necessarily his doctrinal followers, who share something of his theme. We should bear in mind the limitations of other definitions and be ready to regard naturalism rather as we do that other baggy concept romanticism, a vision of the universe and not a particular literary style or consciously maintained doctrine.

Now, what is the vision of naturalism? It is the vision of man existing in a world without intrinsic design or purpose; Christianity and its pale derivatives transcendentalism and pantheism can no longer explain the mystery of the cosmos, offer a promise of, or even

a substitute for a promise of, immortality. In the naturalistic world view there is only one dominant relation, that between man and nature, and only one dominant law, that man is determined by nature. For nature is his domain, and the characteristics which tie him to it (his sensations, his needs, his body) are essential to him to the extent that he may not abstract from them or neglect them. Those characteristics amount to an inescapable bond with the primeval world, a relict of the era when we were closer to ape than human. The significance of the naturalist's belief that this primitive nature is the most essential element of man's reality lies not only in what it affirms but also in what it denies. For example, it denies what a Catholic philosopher like Jacques Maritain maintains, that there is a spiritual, metaphysical order superior to external nature, above all the mechanism and laws of the material world; furthermore, it denies the possibility of Maritain's "science de l'invisible monde des perfections divines déchiffrées dans leurs reflets créés."[9] The naturalist, as we witness his thought in literature, turns away from these supernatural, supra-sensible worlds, since for him there is nothing transcendental. Beyond nature there is more nature.

Naturalism is as much anti-rational as anti-theistic. To the extent that it treats of the mind, naturalism insists that one's mental capacities, one's reason, constitute a category separate from one's physical nature. The powers of mind are not inevitably stronger than those of nature. And to the extent that it treats of human behaviour, naturalism posits no ethical ideals or ends. Nature

does engender human beings who establish ideals and impose norms, but these values arise from the direct relation between man-in-society and his concrete activities, not from any sense of cosmic purpose. Particular values are set up by man through his knowledge of nature and of other men. Human institutions, like the church, law, or morality--in fact our whole society--are humanly derived.

It may be suggested that primitivism would be a more appropriate term than naturalism to describe the subject at hand. We know that the former concept has a noble intellectual lineage extending back to antiquity, to the Cynics and Stoics who claimed to find in primitive man the summum bonum. Since then, the notion of a virtuous state of nature has persisted in various forms throughout history and would include some of the thought of the French Enlightenment, as well as the romantic nature-worship. Arguably, naturalism descends in great part from primitivism, especially from its anti-rationalist convictions: yet the two are not the same thing. It is precisely on the ethical question that they differ. Whereas primitivism, both chronological and cultural (to use Arthur O. Lovejoy's categories),[10] invests man's original nature with the sense of a moral ideal, naturalism attaches to it no normative connotations. For the naturalist, primitive nature cannot constitute a standard because it is amoral, neither essentially good nor evil; and because too, whether we like it or not, such nature is an ineradicable part of man's being.

In literature we may recognise the presence of naturalism when

the natural and instinctive side of man, whose perilous excesses are traditionally checked by the forces of what we call culture or civilisation, is explored in a fictional domain where such forces are not allowed to dominate. This, of course, is not to imply that naturalistic characters behave only a little more intelligently than the beasts of the field; nonetheless, the best examples of thoroughgoing naturalism do illustrate man's animal nature, his irrational, sometimes subrational, potentiality. We think of the career of Brother Medardus in Hoffmann's Die Elixiere des Teufels, possessed by some murderous demon; of the spectacularly violent combat between Gervaise and Virginie in Zola's L'Assonnoir; of McTeague's descent into aggressive animality in Norris's novel. The motif of progressive degeneration among naturalistic heroes and heroines, distinct from rational development, is a common feature of this kind of fiction that even the casual reader will remark. Characters who spring from the naturalistic imagination must surrender to a vast and inexpugnable natural force over reason and civilisation; like Poe's doomed figure Roderick Usher or Ligeia, they are physical beings at the mercy of the fatality of flesh which may drive them into an ever deepening decay resulting in despair or death. Even the conscious and thinking heroes drawn by Zola, such as Lazare of La Joie de vivre and Etienne of Germinal, contend with bodily weakness in one form or another. In their experience perhaps is a variation on the great theme of so much nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature: the myth of the morally isolated individual who asks meaning and purpose from a world that denies him both, and thus determines his own defeat. But the world of naturalism, it will be observed, is character-

istically the chaos of nature, rather than the order of social relations.

Throughout the fiction of Zola, and of the early nineteenth-century Gothic writers and their successors in America, natural passion, amoral and barely repressible, is the first and indispensable condition of their naturalism. It leads us straight into the question of determinism, a word that frequently occurs in discourse about naturalism. For, as Zola asserts (and here we may believe him), "C'est là, dans ce tempérament, que se trouve le déterminisme initial" (X, 1190). In naturalistic creation we understand the important characters to be determined for the most part by a complex of passions and instincts. Such deterministic energies may yield to the strength of rational or social discipline, though usually not for infinitely long periods of time, and do not necessarily exclude the power of free choice. There is, for example, Dimmesdale in Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter who, by dint of Puritan piety, survives the guilt which his carnal desire has driven into him; or there is Jacques in Zola's La Bête humaine who can resist the monster of his homicidal sexuality by keeping away from the flesh of woman. Yet neither of these tortured men succeeds finally in dominating the primordial impulses of nature which they have striven to conceal: Dimmesdale expires in triumphant public confession, and Jacques murders his beloved in a moment of uncontainable frency. Despite conscience, morality, reason, and all the restraints of civilised life, nature will not ultimately be denied.

While accepting the validity of this observation about the

general persistence of natural passion in naturalism, we must admit that it is not quite true of the later American phase. In certain writers of the turn of the nineteenth century, Dreiser and Norris particularly, the physical determinism does not manifest itself through the human body, is not invariably connected with the fatality of flesh. In Sister Carrie and The Octopus, good typical illustrations of such a naturalism, it tends to assume the character of a vast external power which reduces the individual and his ambitions to insignificance before the mystery of the cosmos. So, to the degree that it presents an external determinism, without a consistent interest in passions and appetites, American naturalism of this period may deviate from the model of Zola and his antecedents as I have defined it.

These, then, are some examples of the motifs of naturalism in nineteenth-century literature. They may serve as notice of the sort of approach which I intend to adopt, a thematic approach on the whole, committed to the belief that there is a wisdom to be extracted from literature. That said, however, it must be acknowledged that the fields of our progress through the naturalistic theme are fully sown with critical controversy, and at various moments we shall unavoidably have to face the challenge of established opinion. Only by this confrontation can my own revised definition of naturalism attain a clear validity. The first challenge arises in the effort to see a naturalistic current in Gothic fiction, a mode usually understood to concentrate its attention precisely beyond the natural. Yet I want to show that, for all its phantasmagoria, the Gothic exhibits what I would call a naturalising trend in its evolution from Walpole to Hoffmann. The

phantasms become the psychological projections of man's physical being, which is in ordinary life suppressed by the rational order of civilisation. The Gothic romance or tale is therefore decidedly relevant to the question of the beginnings of nineteenth-century naturalism in view of its exploration of the limits of man's primitive passion, but also in view of its opposition to the realism of the novel. With the concept of realism we encounter a further critical problem. It will be important to situate naturalism as a contrast to the realist tradition of the European novel, which by customary definition confines its vision to the social world. Zola was certainly never any more of a realist than Hawthorne, and it seems to me a mistake to associate him unqualifiedly, as many people do, with the tradition of Stendhal and Balzac. In fact, Zola deserves to be removed not only from the context of realism but from that of what is termed "French naturalism" too. This is the milieu I referred to earlier, a group of late nineteenth-century theories and the literary artists connected to them that have only slight bearing on the discussion of theme in Zola's fiction.

Thus a confrontation with the usually inadequate conventional assumptions about naturalism is as necessary a task as advancing a fresh definition of the concept itself. For, if we have lazily defined naturalism as the candid and dispassionate treatment of real life on the street or in the bedroom, among workers, peasants, or debauchees, if, in short, we conceive of it as an attempt to extend mimetic realism to its furthest logical limits, then we shall never

succeed in comprehending the thematic basis of naturalism. Admittedly, there exists a substantial body of literature, novels and plays, that pretends to "slice-of-life naturalism," according to the judgement of authors and critics. Examples of this kind of peripheral naturalism may be found in Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, George Moore, Arthur Morrison, Steinbeck, and many others, whose prime intention is to expose some form of contemporary moral and social injustice. The application of the term naturalism to these figures is too often casual and thoughtless, especially if it is only employed to mean the faithful reproduction of reality. Truer to the central canon of the phenomenon, as I want to define it, are those writers in Europe and America who depict man in organic relation with nature, not with God, morality or society, since he is ultimately a physical creature.

A world without meaning or purpose: this then is part of the godless universe of naturalism. Its inhabitants are actors in a stupendous theatre, submitting to natural forces, often monstrously cruel. Destitute of certainty, unable to spiritualise nature, the naturalist enacts in his imagination the vitality of the gathering scepticism in the thought of his age. He makes his own unique perceptions about the situation of man in modern civilisation, apparently so far from the primitive life.

Notes to the Introduction

1. Parenthetical references to Zola's works are volume and page numbers from the Oeuvres complètes, ed. Henri Mitterand, 15 vols (Paris: Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966-9). This edition is cited throughout the thesis.

2. It may be of interest to note here F.W.J. Hemming's seminal article, "The Origin of the Terms Naturalisme and Naturaliste," French Studies, 8 (1954), 109-21.

3. Emile Bouvier, La Bataille réaliste (Paris: Fontemoing, 1914), p. v.

4. C.F. Ramuz, Les Grands Moments du XIXe siècle français (Lausanne: Mermod, 1948), p. 207.

5. George J. Becker, "Introduction: Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," in Documents of Modern Literary Realism, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 35.

6. Philip Rahv, "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism," Partisan Review, 9 (1942), p. 279.

7. Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. 37.

8. William C. Frierson, The English Novel in Transition, 1885-1940 (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. xi.

9. Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, Naturalism, The Critical Idiom, 18 (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 13.

10. Haskell M. Block, Naturalistic Triptych: The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 15.

11. Sigfrid Hoefert, "Naturalism as an International Phenomenon: The State of Research," Yearbook of Comparative Literature, 27 (1979), 84-93.

12. Furst and Skrine, op. cit., p. 71.

13. Jacques Maritain, Distinguer pour unir, ou les degrés du savoir, nouv. éd. (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1932), p. 10.

14. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity (1935; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1965), pp. 1-22. This first chapter, "Prolegomena to the History of Primitivism," is Lovejoy's.

CHAPTER ONE

Some Gothic Origins of Naturalism in Literature

We are agreed that at the root of all naturalism is the organic relation between man and physical nature. For the student of literature the obvious place to start seeking such a relation would be romanticism, that is, the prevalent and dominant outlook during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The ideological upheaval of that time tended towards the rejection of the neo-classical conception of nature as mechanism and the acceptance of it as organism; the romantic world-view replaced the philosophical and aesthetic criteria of uniformity, reason, and ideal form, characteristic of the neo-classical period, by those of individualism, imagination, and the energy of the irrational. These values served as a basis for the growth of a heroic natural religion whose high priests were the veritable avatars of international romanticism.

In romantic poetry (and I am thinking here chiefly of the English species) one of the strongest influences was animism, a belief that life could be found in each natural object and that, through the imagination, a real communication, if not reciprocal union, was possible between man and the forms of nature. This dogma contributed to the leading sense of "imagination" embraced

by the great nature-poets Wordsworth and Coleridge: the power operative in man's experience of the external world and enabling him to recognise sensibility, purpose, and significance in natural objects. The imagination for these poets meant quite simply the capacity to apprehend, in their contemplation of them, the life of objects in the real world and hence enter into a relationship with them in which all their qualities could be experienced, qualities of character, moral reassurance, and emotional depth. At this point, given the premises outlined in the foregoing chapter, we should be in a position to realise that the Lake Poets' conception of nature is not naturalistic, since they, like other European romantic writers in the tradition of nature-poetry, strove to humanise nature, rather than to naturalise man. Wordsworth might sanction such a generalisation, judging from the evidence of the last four lines of his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality":

> Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The poet sees that "the meanest flower" owes its association with the soul not to itself but to the human sensibility which transforms it.

The animism of English romantic poetry, from Wordsworth to Byron, presupposed a benevolent nature. Yet whereas that conception was assuredly an important and vastly influential phenomenon, it was not the only manifestation of what we might call the romantic spirit. Taking the opposite view, that nature was by no means necessarily

benevolent or morally invigorating, Gothic literature, for example, should be considered at least as integral to the variegated pattern of romanticism. Kenneth Clark's point of view is typical of the conventional critical attitude: "The taste for the Gothic is . . . an essential expression of Romanticism, so closely related to every other expression of the same impulse that it is difficult to write on the Gothic Revival without plunging into the history of the Romantic Movement."[1] Now although the Gothic perception of reality has distinct animistic overtones and tends to situate man in a natural environment to which he is related with emotional intensity, Gothic literature is far from Wordsworthian, lacking a prophetic sense of the earth's goodness, of trust in providence and progress. It is, rather, a "dark romanticism," aware of the limits of human rationality and the illimitable potential of the mysterious nature that exists within and beyond the physical body. German literature, particularly, was infused with this thought, as we see in the fictions of artists like Kleist, Tieck, Brentano, Arnim, and Hoffmann--admittedly not all displaying consistently the formal lineaments of the Gothic, but nevertheless responsive in greater or lesser measure to its theme. "In the tragedy of fate," writes René Wellek, "the German Romantics found a peculiar form for what is, it seems, the basic outlook on life, the attitude, the 'vision' of the German Romantics--their feeling for the uncanny, the menace, the sense of evil lurking behind the façade of the world."[2] Wellek, incidentally, proceeds to insist that German romanticism alone contains this atmosphere, in contrast to English and French romanticism which is "Rousseauistic";[3] however, at least as far as

England is concerned, such an atmosphere does exist in the noble Gothic tradition that extends from Walpole to Maturin and parallel with other romantic impulses.

My belief is that the Gothic literature of the romantic period is naturalistic, a kind of proto-naturalism if you will. Conceived as principles of nature, the common Gothic values of passionateness, wildness, and formal irregularity, as often applied to architecture and literature, and distinct from other contemporary values, seem to fall quite within the purview of our definition of naturalism. It is, I think, the peculiar conception of nature we find in the Gothic that above all suggests its relation to the naturalistic tradition. The crucial assumption constantly informing Gothic art, that amoral physical nature constitutes the eternally dominant force in the universe, before which even the human spirit is humbled, is that of naturalism too. For this proposition to obtain we must take for granted a rather precise meaning of nature in the epoch of the Gothic Revival, no easy task given that Lovejoy has authoritatively determined sixty interpretations of the word in its normative functions for the eighteenth century.[4] We need to recognise that Gothic nature is clearly different from neo-classical, Enlightenment or other romantic natures; that, for example, when Schelling speaks of Gothic art as a "direct imitation of nature,"[5] he is not referring to any Aristotelian postulates, but to the capacity of this sort of art to represent the irregularity of nature immediately (i.e., in an

unmediated way), without adherence to proven aesthetic models. In fact, the Gothic sense of nature as inherently amoral, wild and lawless, which man cannot transcend, outlived the romantic period with its rival conceptions and showed itself very much consonant with the new age of biological science. Mutatis mutandis it has persisted into the literature of that age, the literature of naturalism. But this matter we should leave for a later discussion.

The present chapter is dedicated to the idea that Gothic literature may be said, without scholarly exaggeration, to embody some definable naturalistic properties. By introducing the Gothic phase as a particular movement in the history of literature and ideas, I hope to underscore the intellectual continuity of its tradition, to situate its primitive emotions, symbolic landscapes, and uncanny determinism in a dynamic context which would harmonise with our developing concept of naturalism. I intend to begin by arguing in favour of a fundamental distinction between the Gothic romance and the novel, recognising that they are two discrete genres separated by a wide ideological gulf. They are different modes of perception in modern literature. As a counter-tradition, then, the Gothic grows from its reaction to neo-classicism and the Enlightenment, passes through "English" and "Germanic" stages, and is ultimately naturalised in the fiction of Tieck and Hoffmann. By naturalisation I mean the reduction of the supernatural, as an objective force in the universe, to the natural, as a subjective and irrational force. The mysterious energies of external and internal reality are revealed to be no more nor less than the

order of nature. Such a process of naturalisation I take to be primary evidence of the genesis of the same nineteenth-century worldview which gave impetus to naturalism.

First of all, though, it might be worthwhile to look briefly at the critical background to the Gothic in aesthetic spheres other than the merely literary, seeking a closer definition of the Geist (a not inappropriate word to use here) of the phenomenon. Among eighteenth-century English commentators on art, it was Edmund Burke who first raised imperfection, deformity, and irregularity of design, in fact the whole concept of sublime, to an aesthetic prinicple. In his youthful treatise on The Sublime and Beautiful (1757), while evincing a customary Augustan prejudice against the Gothic,[6] Burke nevertheless gave rise to premises that would imply a preference of the Gothic over the Grecian style: he propounded the notion that the idea of exact proportion was an artificial intrusion of man into nature, rather than derived from nature itself.[7] Some thirty years later Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his thirteenth Discourse, avowed that Gothic architecture was capable of inspiring one with great and sublime ideas; much more than Grecian architecture, it appealed to the imagination, "with which the Artist is more concerned than with absolute truth."[8] It remained for Ruskin to resume the qualities of the Gothic as they had come to be defined during the romantic and pre-romantic periods, imposing on the debate the point of view that Gothic art is as much involved with creative mind as with created form; it is

both subject and object.[9] This assumption of a dialectic of subject and object implies a romantic perspective, one that has developed from some reflection on idealist theories of mind. If we turn to Hegel, we will find a satisfyingly lucid account of the romantic dialectic in the creative process and the cultural and religious importance of the Gothic art that springs from it.

According to Hegel, romantic art (that is, post-classical art in his conception) is born of the transformation of the gods of the Greeks into the God of Christianity. Divinity is henceforth to be found in man's soul and not on Mount Olympus: St.Augustine, we recall, argued that we will discover the meaning of God by examining our own thoughts and feelings. Since the Absolute resides somewhere in the human spirit, and since there does exist an inward force that seeks to express itself in matter, it is thus the duty of the artist to direct his attention to man's essence, which is mind and emotion: "For here subjectivity is precisely the inner life, explicit to itself, turned back out of its embodiment in externality into feeling, heart, mind, and meditation."[10] This principle of subjectivity, which governs all romantic art, does not reduce the aesthetic process to an exclusively internal mechanism; on the contrary, it deals with the universal character of spiritual conflicts. After all, the artist has a contingent existence in nature and cannot neglect the presence of external reality. Unlike the classical artist, says Hegel, the romantic artist does not devote himself to the human physique or material

environment, but studies such external qualities only insofar as they express some significant strain or struggle, some writhing of the soul.

In Hegel's view Gothic architecture represents the zenith of medieval culture, the distinctive style of Christianity, and is moreover one of the most perfect realisations of the romantic spirit. Only one who is conscious of the philosophical advances of Christian over Greek thought may apprehend the value of Gothic art. For the Greeks, we remember, the characteristic symmetry and stability of their art expressed a faith in a rational ideal and a finite universe. In the Christian worldview, however, God is the sole ideal, perfect in his rationality, and man must suffer a conflict between the rational and passionate impulses within himself. Thus Gothic architecture appealed to the Christian because it signified the infinitude of God and the striving of an imperfect man towards higher truth. Anyone who has visited the cathedrals at Amiens, Chartres, or Strasbourg would have been struck by the sense of enormous space and verticality, of great heights apparently reaching into infinity.

There is good reason to believe in the essential continuity of the medieval architectural style and the later literary mode, secularised and intellectually revivified. The question of influence is not irrelevant here, as W. P. Ker reminds us:

> Gothic churches and old castles have exerted a mediaeval literary influence on many authors who had no close acquaintance with old French and German poets, and not much curiosity about their ideals or their style. . . . The Middle Ages did much to help literary fancy before the time of Scott; but the thrill of mystery and wonder came more from Gothic buildings than from Morte d'Arthur, and it is found in writers who paid little or no attention to old English romance, as well as those who showed their interest in it.[11]

Indeed, Gothic literature does maintain a romantic sentiment towards the Middle Ages, and its landscape, which symbolises the chaotic passions of individual men and women, is composed of unexplored forests and hills and of the castles and monasteries of a feudal past. It conceives of human character as prey to the multitude of dark forces in the determined universe, natural or supernatural, and as occupying a fixed station in the natural chain of being which he usurps at his peril.

Now despite its alliance with the respectable phenomenon of romanticism and its demonstrable resistance to literary anachronism, Gothic literature is still too often regarded as undeserving of serious appraisal, an intellectual accomplishment far inferior to that of the novel. It has been remarked, for instance, that Gothic romances are the product of their authors' pursuit of "daydreams and wish-fulfilment."[12] So, if we are to raise the genre above the level of artificially stimulated horripilation we should bring it into comparison with the novel--or rather contrast, because we are seeking to discern its own tradition and meaning within romanticism.

Francis Russell Hart makes an interesting attempt to dignify the Gothic by looking upon its hero-villains as characters whose social nature has been somehow perverted, instead of as mere stylised figures or psychological projections. Hart suggests that demonic possession is not to be interpreted as a pure condition of mind but rather as a consequence of unrequited desire and thwarted social relationship. Thus Montoni in The Mysteries of Udolpho, Falkland in Caleb Williams, and Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights become spectral beings because their passion remains unfulfilled. According to Hart, these demonic personages are a function of social relationship in the sense that they do have characters independent of rôle. On the ground that the novel revolves around man's social character, Hart arrives at the following generalisation about the Gothic romance: "Rather than representing a flight from novel to romance, the Gothic represents a naturalizing of myth and romance into novel."[13] In spite of the original argument about Gothic character, this conclusion seems to me invalid. The social world of the novel which informs the characters is not the mere system of "interpersonal relations"[14] that Hart takes it for: it is a system of traditions, institutions, and inherited values, portrayed as a force that regulates ordinary and censures extraordinary human behaviour. For, unlike the romance, the novel does try to portray this force, an indissoluble objective existence recognisable in the comic career of Tom Jones towards good fortune as in the Napoleonic antics of Julien Sorel. In the Gothic romance, by contrast, a society

has very little objective existence beyond the perception of the characters, who move in a world of violence and amoral power. They are not mimetic but symbolic, and as such they could only live in the romance.

That the spirit of the Gothic is ultimately unassimilable to that of the novel is implicitly acknowledged by those who see it as a form of romanticism. Of course, romanticism and the novel are not necessarily inimical to one another, yet the historical association of Gothic with romantic and the novel with classical-mimetic is something we cannot fail to notice. To be sure, although the concept of the Gothic goes beyond the merely literary and aesthetic and achieves theological, scientific, and moral dimensions, its first premise, in form and content, is the reaction of romanticism against neo-classicism. It is, as Paul van Tieghem describes it, "une crise de la conscience européenne."[15]

The effects of such a tension may be observed in the Gothic hero himself, whose exigencies could never be contained by the conventional novel. The point is well recognised by William F. Axton in the introduction to his edition of Melmoth the Wanderer:

> Ultimately, the typical hero-villain is more a psychological projection than a realistic [i.e., novelistic] representation, for he personifies the moral rebellion of his times against the stifling authoritarian tradition. . . . As old as the protagonist of Jacobean revenge-tragedy, the damnable but admirable hero-villain of high Gothic fiction is a personage

> whose evil is the result of a clash between his passionate nature and powerful individual will and the unnatural restraints of convention, orthodoxy, or tradition.[16]

The reference to revenge-tragedy is pertinent here. For among the characteristics which the Gothic villain inherits from his Elizabethan and Jacobean prototype--egotism, treachery, remorselessness, murderous disposition, and so on--is the element of tragic conflict.[17] This quality, a measure of the depth of the struggle between neo-classical virtue and demonic self-indulgence, we catch a glimpse of in characters like Schedoni in Radcliffe's The Italian, Ambrosio in Lewis's The Monk, and Melmoth in Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer. Confronted by the sweet innocence of the object of his passion, the villain may suffer a crisis of conscience, brief enough to reveal his original humanity. For instance Ambrosio violently ravishes the fair Antonia, but "there was something in her look which penetrated him with horror; and though his understanding was still ignorant of it, Conscience pointed out to him the whole extent of his crime."[18] Similarly, Melmoth is afflicted by his momentary human feeling for Immalee:

> One generous, one human feeling, throbbed in his veins, and thrilled his heart. . . . He turned aside, and did not weep; or if he did, wiped away his tears, as a fiend might do, with burning talons, when he sees a new victim arrive for torture; and repenting his repentence, rends away the blot of compunction, and arms himself for his task of renewed infliction.[19]

Such examples as these realise the dimensions of the rebellion against the thought of the eighteenth century, that of neo-classicism and the Enlightenment. By their depiction of man's

conscious capacity for evil, they may be said to challenge contemporary teleological and progressivist notions about human development through history. It goes virtually without saying that of all literary forms the Gothic romance has the most freedom to explore the natural and unnatural limits of man's primitive passion. The immemorial distinction between sense and sensibility belongs properly to the finite universe of the novel, where the range of experience available to a character is circumscribed by moral and social norms.

Although the Gothic romance, as I have said, is associated primarily with European romanticism, it made its first appearance in the neo-classical age. Walpole established a model of the Gothic mode in The Castle of Otranto (1764), influential in Germany as in England. In a sense this work is half romance and half novel, as the author himself gives us to believe when he speaks, in his preface to the second edition, about his effort to reconcile imagination and probability.[20] As a romance, The Castle of Otranto emphasises a generally medieval ornamentation intended to generate a romantic sense of wonder and mystery--deep and gloomy shadows, stained windows, vaults, tombs, and so on. Its characters illustrate the types that were to be modified and developed by the tradition which extends from Mrs. Radcliffe to Hollywood: Manfred, the demonic, passionate, and lustful prince, suffering the guilt of a hereditary crime; Hippolita, his innocent, virtuous, and dutiful wife; Matilda, his beautiful and

saintly daughter; Isabella, the lovely damsel in distress, brutalised by evil guardians and prey to the lusts of Manfred; Frederic, her father, who returns from the Holy Land to rescue her; Theodore, the handsome stranger and peasant, who turns out to be the legal heir to the castle and is therefore entitled to marry the noble Isabella; Theodore's father, the priest Jerome, formerly Count of Falconara, who had taken holy orders after the loss of his wife and, so he assumed, his son. In addition, there are assorted ghosts and moronic servants, who provide respectively the supernatural and comic aspects of the tale. Walpole proposed to ennoble his Gothicism by assimilating it to the rules of tragic drama. The five chapters of the story correspond to the five acts of classical tragedy, and the action is designed to arouse and purge the tragic emotions according to Aristotelian catharsis. This formal discipline, in a work of Gothic inspiration, reduces spontaneity of style and makes for frigid melodrama. It results in what we might call Gothic hyper-stylisation. For example, when Manfred, alone with Isabella, advances to seize her, the following incident occurs:

> At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast. Isabella, whose back was turned to the picture, saw not the motion, nor knew whence the sound came, but started and said, Hark my lord! what sound was that? and at the same time made towards the door.[21]

While such instances as this one reveal the crudity of Walpole's Gothic method, we must recognise that <u>The Castle of</u>

Otranto exerted a powerful effect on later adherents of the convention. In Mrs. Radcliffe's and "Monk" Lewis's hands the form becomes less strained and stilted, more effectively spontaneous. They appear to know that the mysterious Gothic frisson deserves to be freed from antiquarian medievalism with its atmosphere of chivalric virtue. For our present purpose, however, the point to be drawn from Walpole's example is that the Gothic and classical-mimetic modes do not blend well.

Having said this much about the distinction between the novel and the Gothic romance and the separate traditions to which they belong, I would like to pass on to a consideration of the progress of the Gothic as a counter-tradition, a perceptible movement from the supernatural, explained or unexplained, to the natural and irrational. According to J.M.S. Tompkins, there were two identifiable types of Gothic romance which surfaced in England towards the end of the eighteenth century.[22] The first was the "English" model championed by Mrs. Radcliffe, who portrays little violence, whose supernatural phenomena are rationally explainable, and whose heroines never get their dresses stained. The essential Gothic drama takes place in the imagination of a sensitive girl, and the terror is induced, not in the diabolical happening itself, but in the developing apprehension within the victim. The second kind of Gothic romance was the "Germanic," arising, among other reasons, from the impact of available English translations of Schauerromane. Practised by "Monk" Lewis, the

Germanic horror was intended to be far more immediately shocking, a dark and impassioned force loosed on the world. Supernatural events remain unexplained, evil is absolute, and man's physical and spiritual stature is extended by proportions that are more imagined than real. Another way of approaching this broad distinction, if we overlook the varying uses of the supernatural, is by reference to the difference between terror and horror, as defined by Mrs. Radcliffe.[23] The exponents of terror, such as Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe, depend for their effects on suspense and dread, delayed crises (Theodore's execution in The Castle of Otranto) and glimmering possibilities (Emily's reconciliation with Valancourt at the end of The Mysteries of Udolpho). In his preface to the first edition of The Castle of Otranto Walpole describes terror as "the author's principal engine," which "prevents the story from ever languishing."[24] By contrast, the exponents of horror (historically a later phase of English Gothic), such as Lewis, Mary Shelley, and Maturin, are inclined to pile up a succession of shocking events, including rape, torture, and murder, yet accompanied by an atmosphere of guilt and sin.

At any rate, it seems that a shift of interest has occurred among Gothic writers, from the drama of suspense and the natural or supernatural power of external reality to the drama of the mind and its unknown, dark psychic forces. Put in its simplest terms, argues Robert D. Hume, "the suspense of external circumstance is de-emphasized in favor of increasing psychological concern

with moral ambiguity."[25] We get some idea of the nature of this shift in a work like The Monk, where, despite the occasional incidence of the unexplained supernatural, the true deterministic force is extraordinary sexual passion: the devil in Ambrosio is the libido.[26] What happens is that we become involved primarily with the consciousness of the villain-protagonist, through whom we penetrate to the theme of moral ambiguity. His career amounts to a statement about the inescapability of evil and the imperfectibility of man, who is rooted in physical nature. The question posed by the profounder and more mature Gothic romances may be formulated thus: is not every man, given his potential for imaginative energy and illimitable desires, capable of unusual criminal passion? Victor Frankenstein, for instance, aspires to godhead, but the effort destroys him: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source."[27] The monster he creates is a diabolical reflection of his own personality, of his desire to dominate nature, and the irony is that, in an important sense, he is the monster.

In search of a more precise conception of these moral and psychological dimensions we would do well to turn to some examples yielded by German romanticism, particularly those of Tieck and Hoffmann. By saying this I do not mean to imply that all German romanticism is characterised as "dark" or Gothic. We know that

not all writers of that period were prepared to acknowledge the existence of a "Nachtseite der Natur," and many of them tended instead to adopt more affirmative views of nature. Schelling, for example, with his massively influential Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur (1797), attempted to bring about a harmony of nature and spirit on the assumption that both are the expression of an absolute principle (cf. Emerson's endeavour as represented in my next chapter). Similarly, Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Eichendorff accepted an implicit faith in the beneficence of nature, which was the touchstone of their Christian mysticism and mythology. And nor did Goethe, man of science and quasi-evolutionist though he was, want to think of nature as anything other than ultimately good and amenable to man's moral and spiritual development. Nevertheless, there was a parallel strain of romantic thought, as in England at the same time, that held the natural universe to be far from beneficent and man to be subject to mysterious forces beyond his reason: this thought plays a considerable part in the fictions of Tieck and Hoffmann. Now although such artists are never regarded as exclusively "Gothic writers," they yet display enough characteristics of the mode to merit an inclusion in the tradition, which they deepen and enrich.

From the complicated network of Anglo-German literary relations we may draw out the fact that English influences had a good deal to do with the Gothic Revival in Germany and with the Gothic spirit in much of the romantic literature.[28] This fact is hardly

surprising when we reflect that the ground was prepared by the already existing conventions of the folk tale, the Ritter-, Räuber-, and Schauerroman, and by a romanticism which had very strong medieval interests. Many people equated "Gothic" with "Germanic." France, by contrast, did not entertain a significant and independent Gothic tradition: among French writers, claims Madame de Staël, clarity has prime importance, a virtue which disperses all obscurity and mystery and replaces them with the pure light of explanation.[29] Also, France, unlike Germany, was nurturing a tradition of the realist novel, something we must acknowledge as antipathetic to the Gothic spirit.[30]

It is possible that the Märchen of Tieck and Hoffmann, the form through which German romanticism found its most original expression, is indebted to the examples of Radcliffe and Lewis, particularly in its opposition to historical truth, its evocation of the magical and grotesque, and its evocation of dream-like landscapes. In effect, dream and reality become interfused: "Die Welt wird Traum, der Traum wird Welt," to cite the motto of the second part of Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen. Like other German romantics, the Gothically inspired artists wanted to poeticise the real world, transform it into a land of fantasy, but a fantasy that could comprehend the range of good and evil as subjective energies. Putting forward such a total claim for the imagination, these writers responded to the intellectual rather than the sensational appeal of the Gothic, the psychological rather than the physical.

If we are looking for a closer definition of the nature of the Gothic in the German romantic tale, then there could be no better starting-point than Tieck. Tieck's evocation of horror and mystery in his fiction, which in its moral and psychological complexity goes beyond the form of the Volksmärchen, is to a great extent a technical achievement: exploring the fictional possibilities of demonic possession and the sinister menace of the supernatural, he was able to devise situations which would emphasise violent surprise or unexplained mystery. Yet he never concerned himself with portraying the motives for human behaviour, conceiving of it as an expression of man's fate within the ineffable vastness of nature; and thus his characters tend to be like puppets, extravagantly contrived, dream-like in their movements, and tortured by their inescapable destiny. Unlike Hoffmann, Tieck has no desire to penetrate the different substrata of consciousness which serve to explain and inspire personality.

"Der blonde Eckbert" is a good illustration of the way Tieck dramatises his philosophical apprehension of the world. In the tale virulent and vengeful subconscious forces, masked (so we come to believe) as supernatural forces, are loosed upon the two central characters, Eckbert and Bertha, as a result of man's unnatural crimes, his greed, dishonesty, lovelessness, deceit, and so on. Both Eckbert and Bertha are initially guiltless, yet, by the great chain of fatality, they are led to commit those sins and therefore enter the unholy state of archetypal sinners. Sinning

against nature, they re-enact the biblical story of man's fall from Paradise, of which Waldeinsamkeit is the symbol in the tale. Capricious destiny plays a cruel trick on this lonely pair as it impels them to perform actions without forethought, in fact without free will. The first palpable evidence of an irrational power at work comes early in Bertha's story when she leaves her parents' home: "Als der Tag graute, stand ich auf und eröffnete, fast ohne dass ich es wusste, die Tür unsrer kleinen Hütte."[31] Similarly, when Eckbert encounters the innocent Walther in the forest, he shoots him with his cross-bow "ohne zu wissen, was er tat."[32] In "Der Runenberg," another tale of destructive guilt and malevolent destiny, the hero's motivation is, in the beginning at least, made more humanly explicable. For it is irresistible lust for the riches of fairyland that lures him away from home. However, there is never any suggestion that Christian possesses a fully rational consciousness; beyond redemption, he lapses into moral impotence, loses his feeling, and, like Eckbert, goes mad. According to Christian's own account, he felt "wie ein Vogel, der in einem Netz gefangen ist und sich vergeblich sträubt, so verstrickt war meine Seele in seltsamen Vorstellungen und Wünschen."[33]

In reading Tieck we may be in doubt about whether the supernatural possession he depicts is merely fatal demonic enslavement by an external power or a manifestation of unacknowledged and base feelings within man himself. I have inclined towards the latter interpretation, as have indeed most critics.[34] Anyway,

we need not carry this doubt into our appreciation of E.T.A. Hoffmann. For he does demonstrate a belief that man has created his own dark destiny, casts his own fairytale spells. Adapting the Gothic environment to satisfy new meanings, Hoffmann situates his characters in an ordinary bourgeois setting and not in the magical countryside of the folk tale. Which, of course, is not to deny that Hoffmann uses the machinery and properties of the Märchen. Unlike Tieck, who removes much of the basis of reality in his fantasies, Hoffmann portrays the real and the transcendental simultaneously.

In Hoffmann's Novellen as in the English Gothic romance, evil is a powerful antagonist, frequently undermining voluntary action. When, for instance, Erasmus Spikher beholds the darkly beautiful Guilietta in Die Abenteuer der Silvesternacht, he is mysteriously smitten "dass er selbst nicht wusste, was sich denn so gewaltsam in seinem Innern rege."[35] It is evidently not genuine love that he feels, but some absolute physical passion. This recurrent interposition of an insidious omnipotent force might well strain the reader's willingness to believe, but then verisimilitude was never a compelling criterion for the Gothic artist. The question may be, does Hoffmann go too far in representing man as subject to the fatal caprices of an evil power? Sir Walter Scott seems to think so when he contends, in an essay on Hoffmann, that the Gothic must involve a legitimate human interest, not indulgence in the grotesque for its own sake,

a flaw he perceived in Der Sandmann specifically. Speaking as a novelist himself, with a natural prejudice in favour of things explained, he argues thus:

> Unfortunately,[Hoffmann's] taste and temperament directed him too strongly to the grotesque and fantastic,--carried him too far "extra moenia flamantia mundi," too much beyond the circle not only of probability but even of possibility, to admit of his composing much in the better style to which he might easily have attained.[36]

In point of fact, there are two kinds of approach to the supernatural in Hoffmann's work: the first, which is more obvious, views characters and events in a loosely allegorical way and finally reveals the demonic figure as no less than an emissary of the devil, for example Lisa in Der goldene Topf; the second and decidedly more rewarding approach will admit some doubt about the improbable happenings and promotes at least a non-rational explanation. This second approach, which Das Majorat and Der Sandmann certainly encourage, while not insisting on perfect verisimilitude, does tend towards a surer and more realistic frame of reference. Pointing out Hoffmann's technique of gradually establishing a close sympathetic bond between the protagonist and narrator, Wolfgang Kayser regards Der Sandmann as a peculiar combination of mysterious and real--mysterious from the point of view of the suffering hero, unable to resist the demon that pursues him; and real in the sense that his condition might be explainable in psychological terms, given his alternation between clear perception and insane delusion.[37]

To be sure, a psychological interpretation deserves a place

here. Freud has a thory of feeling, articulated in the essay "Das Unheimliche" ("The Uncanny"), which might prove interesting for our purposes. Characteristically, he locates the uncanny in the mind of the perceiver or the race: on the conscious level it is something unfamiliar and strange, but on the unconscious level, that of the irrational, it is a revival of an infantile complex. Taking Hoffmann's Der Sandmann as his example, Freud speculates that the hero's phantom antagonist is in fact a double who becomes a harbinger of death and an obsessive psychological state developed from childhood fears.[38] Credible or not, Freud's thesis yields a fascinating insight into Hoffmann's Gothicism. It seems conceivable that the elements of tragic conflict which we may have observed in The Monk, Caleb Williams, and Melmoth the Wanderer have separated and become two different bodies. In one body are one's sanity, social poise, rationality, and self-control, and in the other is a rapacious demon, the realisation of all one's latent fears, anxieties, and guilt. Gothic fiction, shifting from a sensational to an intellectual preoccupation with man, has assumed a virtually scientific purpose, interested in man as a psychological disunity.

Let us be totally clear about the sense in which the use of the uncanny demonstrates a naturalising trend in Gothic fiction, a shift away from the transcendental. The distinctive mark of the uncanny is its natural rather than supernatural origin, its appearance as strange but real. According to the thesis of Todorov, who

has undertaken a thorough investigation of what constitutes the fantastic in literature, the uncanny ("l'étrange") must be characterised as conformable to the laws of reality and admitting of an explanation, in contrast to the marvellous ("le merveilleux"), for which new laws of nature have to be devised to account for it. These two tendencies, he contends, find their way into the literary Gothic as respectively the supernatural explained and unexplained. Such a distinction deserves our prima facie acceptance; yet Todorov, it seems to me, jeopardises the integrity of his argument by neglecting to define what he means by "explained." Citing the fiction of Clara Reeve and Ann Radcliffe as examples of the supernatural explained (the uncanny), he implies, and rightly so, that the sort of explanation we find there is rational.[39] However, as we know from our reading of Tieck and Hoffmann, the explanation may well be irrational, that is, defiant of any principles of reason even though completely natural. If we care to recognise that the irrational and natural are a condition of the naturalism of the scientific age, then we cannot avoid reflecting on the gulf of consciousness that separates Hoffmann from Radcliffe, the transition from one use of the uncanny to the other. The naturalised uncanny in Hoffmann's Gothic tells us that the supernatural has been drawn within not only the limits of human experience, but also the human mind and body; that because man is now considered to be a participant in a dynamic nature and not a simple observer of it, like Radcliffe's heroines, the primal force which propels the characters has become subjective. But then perhaps all this is

just a complicated way of saying that since the 1790s when Radcliffe wrote, the whole impact of romanticism has been brought to bear.

That there does exist an irrational explanation for the supernatural in much of Hoffmann's fiction is no mere critical suspicion. The author of Der Sandmann gives us some direct evidence of a possible subjective origin of the "dunkle physische Macht" when Klara quotes her brother Lothar's advice about Nathanael's uncanny enslavement by the demonic Coppelius:

> "Es ist auch gewiss . . . dass die dunkle physische Macht, haben wir uns durch uns selbst ihr hingegeben, oft fremde Gestalten, die die Aussenwelt uns in den Weg wirft, in unser Inneres hineinzieht, so, dass wir selbst nur den Geist entzünden, der, wie wir in wunderlicher Täuschung glauben, aus jener Gestalt spricht. Es ist das Phantom unseres eigen Ichs, dessen innige Verwandtschaft und dessen tiefe Einwirkung auf unser Gemüt uns in die Hölle wirft oder in den Himmel verzückt."[40]

The phantom that may carry us to heaven or hell, despite conscious voluntariness, expresses our amoral physical nature, the part of us that connects us with the vast external nature. It was Gothic romanticism that made such a connection possible in literature.

I would like to introduce one final example from Hoffmann which, even more than Der Sandmann, may be seen to complete the tendency towards naturalisation or internalisation. Owing to its very obvious Gothicism, we cannot afford to neglect this illustration. In Die Elixiere des Teufels Hoffmann explores the case of the criminal monk who, like Lewis's Ambrosio, exhibits the extremes

of piety and Satanic passion. Hoffmann's short romance presents most of the characteristics proper to the Gothic mode: complicated blood-relationships, unaccountable accidents, magic potion, demon-possession, and so on. But most importantly it is a variation on the theme of the double. We meet a man of mysterious origins, raised in the intellectual atmosphere of a monastery, who as an adolescent submits to an erotic experience that turns his life into an everlasting combat between recurrent hallucination and noble religiosity. For Brother Medardus the crisis arrives when he surrenders himself to his lust for a fair penitent and to the sacrilege of tasting the Devil's Elixir which is kept in secret by the monastery. On being sent out into the world by his Superior, Medardus commits murder, assumes the rôle of his victim, and is thereafter dogged by him, an ulterior presence consumed by maniacal sensuality. It appears that the only way he can exorcise the other half of his personality is by murdering his beloved Aurelie at the hands of his crazed double. This accomplished, and her forgiveness granted, the double disappears, presumably having consummated his demonic passion. Medardus is thus liberated from his oppressive duplicity and his feeling towards Aurelie become spiritually purified.

Here is a question: given that Die Elixiere des Teufels is concerned with the fantastic excesses of split-personality and seems in many ways to anticipate Freud, would it not make more sense to speak of the work as a prototype of the psychological

novel than as an example of proto-naturalism? In fact, neither view excludes the other, and there is no good reason for not regarding Hoffmann as a precursor in both kinds of fiction. Die Elixiere des Teufels, however, though obviously involved with human psychology, is by no means a psychological novel in the sense that, say, Crime and Punishment is, wherein conscious or unconscious motive assumes capital importance. It is, rather, a romance of physical passion which portrays a man destitute of motive or free will and possessed, body and mind alike, by some inexpugnable demon. We can say generally that the cause of this wretched phenomenon must lie in the fatal conflict of civilisation and nature, conscience and sexuality. Such is the conflict that Hawthorne apprehends and explores more deeply a few decades after Hoffmann. Medardus's terrifying condition belongs to a category of being which is well within the range of human irrationality, radically disturbing as it may be. It is what Todorov has resumed in the phrase "expérience des limites."[41]

The above discussion about the possibility of different literary-historical points of view of the same material--Gothic in the present case--should alert us to the danger of imposing a too exclusive interpretation on it in order to force the definition of a particular tradition in literature. But it is not my purpose to do any such thing with naturalism. Aware that the genealogy of naturalism cannot be condensed into one tidy generalisation, I am concerned simply to bring into full relief the

assorted evidence in literature of a naturalistic vision. It happens that Gothic fiction to a large extent gives rise to this vision.

That said, it would be worthwhile in conclusion to introduce a few abstract but provocative reflections on the effect of contemporary science on the Gothic. The latter concept and naturalism, as continuous strains of thought, are born of the fecund mother of all nineteenth-century literary movements, romanticism; and they too are among the various responses to the previous dominant phase of neo-classicism. To the neo-classicist, we recall, the proper study of mankind was man, conceived as the ultimate and highest product of earthly creation, a complete and harmonious type of perfect humanity independent of space and time. According to the romanticist, by contrast, man was one moment in the everlasting changefulness of nature, subject to general limitations, and every individual was but one unrepeatable link in the eternal chain of history. Among the most powerful intellectual agencies that contributed to the romantic transformation was the great progress made by physical science, which prefigures the massive scientific revolution of later in the century. The discovery of electricity and the advances in medical science suggested a new and vital organic composition of the phenomenal world. We need only think of the influence, direct or indirect, on Hoffmann of the scientists J.W. Ritter, G. H. von Schubert, and Franz Mesmer to realise the possible

application of the contemporary theories to literature. It is no coincidence that, of all romantic modes, Gothic fiction should be the most receptive to influences from the new science. Such influences must have played a part in naturalising the uncanny and de-supernaturalising the marvellous, and in forming a naturalistic basis for the amoral determinism which infuses the Gothic. Furthermore, in view of this receptivity, this correspondence to the darker implications of scientific development of which I spoke in the previous chapter, we are surely entitled to regard Gothic writers as major interpreters in literature of what Whitehead calls "the order of nature in modern thought"; they are perhaps rightful legatees of the Greek tragedians. "The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today," Whitehead insists, "are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science. Fate in Greek tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought."[42]

With its peculiar conception of the order of nature, opposed to the moral or social order, Gothic fiction must merit a secure place in the history of ideas, as well as in the naturalistic tradition. It tells us that, ultimately, human morality, reason, and religious faith are not enough to make sense of the universe. In a way, perhaps, the Gothic writer shares with those Gothic architects of the Middle Ages a belief in the imperfection of man

in an infinite and finally unknowable universe. To represent the infinite in finite terms he has to do violence to ordinary reality and to impose on it the exigencies of the dream. Thus he differs from the novelist, who pretends to a knowledge of the world he describes--a restrictedly moral and social world, as I stressed earlier--and never stands in awe of the characters he creates. Possibly, then, the real progress of the Gothic as a counter-tradition has been to convince us of its significance, that it may be rescued from the category of mere sub-literary. From Radcliffe's terror to Hoffmann's relentless demons, indeed from Poe's frenzied imagination to Zola's gruesome and bestial Thérèse Raquin, it confronts us with its epistemological ambiguity; it probes the extent of our understanding of good and evil and reveals the depth of human energy that may be exerted against the threatening forces of discipline. The Gothic actually seems to suggest that we are all of us capable of supreme irrationality, of Satanism and rebellion. It takes us beyond society, beyond good and evil, to the infinitude of physical nature.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste (London: Constable, 1950), p. 87.

2. René Wellek, "German and English Romanticism: A Confrontation," Confrontations: Studies in the Intellectual and Literary Relations Between Germany, England, and the United States During the Nineteenth Century (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 19.

3. Ibid.

4. A.O. Lovejoy, "'Nature'as Aesthetic Norm," MLN, XLII (1927), 444-50; rpt. in Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), pp. 69-77.

5. F.W.J. von Schelling, Werke, ed. Otto Weiss (Leipzig: Fritz Eckhardt, 1907), III, 234: "Die gotische Baukunst ist ganz naturalistisch, roh, blosse unmittelbare Nachahmung der Natur. . ."

6. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 76.

7. Ibid., pp. 96-104.

8. Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1959), p. 242.

9. John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," in The Complete Works, ed. Alexander Wedderburn and E.T. Cook (London: George Allen, 1904), X, 180-269. Still one of the best appreciations of eighteenth-century views on Gothic art is A.O. Lovejoy's "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," MLN, XLVII (1932), 419-36: rpt. in Essays in the History of Ideas, pp. 136-165. Among more recent studies of the aesthetic background to Gothic literature without doubt the most noteworthy is Jürgen Klein's Der gotische Roman und die Ästhetik des Bösen, Impulse der Forschung, 20 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975).

10. G.W.F. Hegel, Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II, 794.

11. W. P. Ker, "The Literary Influence of the Middle Ages," in The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. Sir A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1913), X, 217, 218.

12. Lowry Nelson Jr., "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," Yale Review, 52 (1963), 238.

13. Francis Russell Hart, "Experience of Character in the English Gothic Novel," in Experience in the Novel: Selected Papers of the English Institute, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), p. 103.

14. Ibid., p. 96.

15. P. van Tieghem, L'Ere romantique: le romantisme dans la littérature européenne (Paris: A. Michel, 1948), p. 247.

16. Charles Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer, ed. William P. Axton (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. x.

17. See Clara F. McIntyre, "The Later Career of the Elizabethan Villain-Hero," PMLA, 40 (1925), 874-80.

18. Matthew Lewis, The Monk: A Romance, ed. Howard Anderson (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 387.

19. Maturin, op. cit., p. 281.

20. Horace Walpole, The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story, ed. W.D. Lewis (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), p. 7. Walpole, of course, was not writing at a time when the romance-novel distinction was usually made. The two words appear to have been used indifferently until much later in the century. Walpole speaks rather of ancient and modern romance, the latter being what we may take to be the eighteenth-century novel, Tom Jones for example. On this subject see especially Karl Heinz Göller, "Romance" und "Novel": Die Anfänge des englischen Romans, Regensburger Arbeiten zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, I (Regensburg: Hans Carl, 1972), in particular pp. 205-36; and also, for the contemporary debates, Ioan Williams, ed., Novel and Romance 1700-1800: A Documentary Record (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

21. Ibid., pp. 23-4.

22. J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800 (1932; rpt. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 243-7.

23. See her posthumous article in New Monthly Magazine, VII (1826).

24. Walpole, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

25. Robert D. Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel," PMLA, 84 (1969), 285.

26. Tzvetan Todorov makes precisely this point in his Introduction à littérature fantastique (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), P. 134.

27. Mary Shelley, Frankenstein (New York: Doubleday, n.d.)., p. 48.

28. See, for example, W.D. Robson-Scott, The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 25-41. Karl S. Guthke has shown how seminal Lewis's influence was on German writers even before the advent of the so-called romantic period: Englische Vorromantik und deutscher Sturm und Drang: M.G. Lewis' Stellung in der Geschichte der deutsch-englischen Literaturbeziehungen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958).

29. Madame de Staël, De l'Allemagne, ed. H.W. Eve (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 2-3.

30. We know, however, that English Gothic fiction had no small impact on French literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as Alice M. Killen documents in Le Roman terrifiant ou roman noir de Walpole à Anne (sic) Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française jusqu'en 1840 (1920; rpt. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1967). She shows that the serious, distinct from popular, effects of the "genre 'noir'" were accommodated within the texture of romanticism and did not constitute a separate tradition.

31. Ludwig Tieck, "Der blonde Eckbert," "Der Runenberg," "Die Elfen" (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1973), p. 6.

32. Ibid., p. 20.

33. Ibid., p. 28.

34. The variety of interpretation of "Der blonde Eckbert" has been phenomenal, ranging over virtually every approach known to scholarship, but no one has assailed the basic understanding that the tale is about the fall of man, the loss of his primitive innocence, and denial of nature. Among the most balanced of recent analyses I would single out Janis Little Gellinek's "Der blonde Eckbert: A Tieckian Fall from Paradise," in Lebendige Form: Festschrift für Heinrich E.K. Henel, ed. Jeffrey L. Sammons and Ernest Schürer (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1970), pp. 247-66.

35. E.T.A. Hoffmann, Werke, ed. Gisela Spiekerkötter (Köln: Luzia Prösdorf, 1965), I, 226.

36. Walter Scott, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition: and particularly on the Works of Ernest Theodore William Hoffmann," The Foreign Quarterly Review, I (July, 1827), 93.

37. Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1963), p. 70.

38. Sigmund Freud, The Complete Psychological Works, trans. Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), XVII, 234. See also in this connection S.S. Prawer, "Hoffmann's Uncanny Guest: A reading of Der Sandmann," German Life and Letters, 18 (1964-5), 297-308.

39. Todorov, op. cit., pp. 46-7.

40. Hoffmann, op. cit., I, 304.

41. Todorov, op. cit., p. 53.

42. A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925 (1925; rpt. New York: Mentor Books, 1948), p. 17.

CHAPTER TWO

Naturalism in the American Romantic Period

If we can accept the premises offered by the foregoing chapter the transition to American literature will be relatively easy. For, as it has often been said, the Gothic tradition in Europe influenced and inspired nineteenth-century American romanticism, in effect to such an extent that we may consider many integral elements of the latter to be a continuation of the former into new conditions. The principal clues to the existence of a naturalistic strain in the imaginative literature of this period lie precisely in the Gothic legacy, as well as in the kind of cultural consciousness that could accommodate it. The fact is that it was the counter-tradition, that of romance, which took root in America and not the novel. How do we account for this peculiar receptiveness to the romance and the Gothic? I think the answer has much to do with two related things: firstly, the absence in America of the sort of society of manners that would furnish the values which inform the realist novel, a point that is inevitably raised in the discussion of why Henry James left for Europe; secondly, the close presence of nature, still unexplored, unknown, beyond man's sovereignty, and a landscape of such awesome vastness that it could not but take possession of the imagination of the culture. Confronted thus with a wilderness apparently more powerful than civilisation, and bereft of an

established paternalistic state, the artist is alone with the primitive nature inside and outside himself; his mind turns more easily to the possible, the fanciful, or the ideal than to the probable, the explained or the real. It was this awareness that romancers like Brown, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville shared, an awareness of the absolutely fundamental relation between man and nature. For these writers, it is true, nature was often the western frontier and beyond, which, though ever receding, remained for them an enduring metaphor for America itself, a place where civilisation and savagery meet.[1]

We have managed to isolate here, even in so short an introduction to the subject, a couple of important characteristics of American romanticism that may be said to conform to the primary conditions of naturalism. The naturalistic conditions underlying the fiction of such writers as Poe and Hawthorne are, simply stated, as follows: the belief that the natural, instinctive part of man, the part that relates him to the wilderness, is his essence, for better or worse; and the belief, contrary to that of traditional European culture, that humanity may be conceived apart from the laws that bind men and women to community. Insisting on the foundation of all values in the individual consciousness, nineteenth-century American literature, at least until the Civil War, never seriously concerned itself with the question of an authentic conciliation of self and society, which had been the preoccupation of European romantics since Rousseau.[2] This generalisation, by the way, must include "Monsieur Fenimore

Cooper, le grand écrivain américan,"[3] whose Leatherstocking Tales proclaim such Emersonian values as self-reliance and faith in God as a manifestation in nature, and whose Natty Bumppo may be a prophet of an ideal culture, a union of colonial civilisation and noble savagery. And it must also include Hawthorne, who, as I want to show later, does depict the interaction of individuals with their community, but not their conciliation with it. The idea that American fiction views traditional society as irrelevant to human purposes is by no means original. Richard Chase, for example, acknowledges the feeble effect of society on American romanticism when he describes one aspect of the home-grown romance as being "a willingness to abandon moral questions or to ignore the spectacle of man in society, or to consider these things only indirectly or abstractly." He goes on to point out that American fiction rests in its awareness of extreme conditions and makes no effort to resolve contradictions.[4] Given Chase's now classic argument, then, it would come as no surprise that the native romancer prefers to portray the spectacle of man in nature, where no contradiction is involved.

Despite the strong presence of physical nature and the absence of a fully social vision in their fiction, not all the American romancers mentioned so far can be regarded as true naturalists--Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper for instance. It was Brown who first adapted the Gothic manner to the local environment, combining Indian bloodthirstiness with abnormal psychology

in a sort of witch's brew. But although there is something like Tieck's malevolent destiny running through Brown's complicated narratives, it is without the constant suggestion of original sin that would unite the characters with physical nature. Indeed, natural phenomena (the supernatural is always rationally explained) seem to be merely terrific obstacles which beset man in his journey through life and to which he is not vitally related. Cooper may be disqualified from naturalism for different reasons. As I implied above, he tends to affirm the human virtues derivable from nature; he admits the existence of evil in the wilderness but creates the heroic ideal type, at once natural and civilised, to conquer it. On the other hand, in Melville some definite naturalistic lineaments shine forth. The whale Moby-Dick is the living symbol of an all-powerful amoral nature (America itself, some say), and the monomaniac Ahab the archetypal man who seeks to plunder nature yet finally must surrender to it.

In the following analysis, however, I want to fix my attention on the naturalistic elements in Poe and Hawthorne particularly. There are some good reasons for doing so, besides those of economy: these writers develop the theme of moral ambiguity introduced by their European Gothic antecedents, a theme which conceives of man as an essential conflict between rational poise and physical chaos; they drive deeper than any previous artist into the mysteries of the fatality of flesh and know how to represent them in a multitude of symbolic figurations. Furthermore, with their robust naturalistic

consciousness, Poe and Hawthorne contribute to our appreciation of the context in which Zola must be seen. They were born into the age of Emerson, yet their romanticism is of a much darker hue than that of the sage of Concord. If we are to catch the sense of their naturalism, we should first of all dispense with thoughtless axioms like Harold Bloom's, that American romanticism means Emersonianism.[5] In order to underscore the distinctiveness of Poe and Hawthorne in this age, I intend to begin my discussion by carefully removing the epithet "Emersonian" from them. The perceptions of the naturalists and the transcendentalist about man's relation to nature deserve to be compared, but the differences are crucial.

As the nineteenth century wore on it became clear that the mind of the majority of Americans was unable to decide whether the colonists of the western wilderness were the disseminators of civilisation, that is, noble torch-bearers of reason, or romantic escapees from civilisation. But among less confused idealists like Emerson and his congeners there existed a third view, that America, unlike the ruinously over-industrialised Europe, was blessed with the chance to bring about a reconciliation of man and nature. Responding to the reformative, affirmative strain in European romanticism, Emerson accepted neither of those first two conventional solutions to the urgent problems confronting modern man and preferred to envisage a state in which urban landscape and natural hinterland would be perfectly harmonised. He was confident about the eventual establishment of what he called "the national mind"[6] which would embody

the best elements of the American genius, both urban and rural.[7]

The recurrent metaphors of reconciliation in Emerson's writings arise from his concern with the possibility that social and scientific progress has the power to exclude religion. He wanted to be the prophet of a new infusion of spirituality into the life of man. In effect, New England transcendentalism may be conceived as a response to the orthodox dualism which was enforcing the separateness of religious faith and nature, spirituality and science. Emerson achieves his transcendentalist monism by postulating that nature is a symbol of spirit. According to Charles Child Walcutt, whose argument about Emerson in American Literary Naturalism I am following here, "what is ideal or absolute as spirit is translated into physical laws and perfectly embodied (incarnated) as nature."[8] There are two ways of reaching spiritual truth, through the mind and its application of rational understanding or through the contemplation of nature, but both enquiries are equal before God because they are equally penetrated by his divinity. We have only to turn to Thoreau's Walden to witness a man's search for spiritual peace by applying his mind to the facts of nature.

In Walcutt's view this Emersonian idea of a unity of nature and spirit lies behind the American Dream, which invests scientific progress with spiritual sanction: "It unites the practical world and the spiritual world, in a spiritual quest for perfection through

mastery of nature."[9] What Walcutt refers to as the "divided stream" of the American naturalism of the 1890s and beyond involves an inevitable bifurcation of this monism into two opposing strains of thought, both associated with the advance of America towards a technological state: they are on the one hand optimism and freedom, and on the other pessimism and determinism. And, of course, with the advent of such a schism in the national consciousness the nineteenth century ideal fusion of mind and nature disintegrated. The sense of the divided stream reflects man's incapacity finally to answer the question about whether he controls social and scientific progress or it controls him. There is another unavoidable question, one that post-Puritan transcendentalism never cared to engage, about whether man is ultimately capable of controlling himself, given that he is still to a great extent an instinctive animal, that in fact his reason is not all-conquering.

It can be argued that American naturalism--the movement that includes figures like Crane, Norris, and Dreiser--derives much of its artistic impetus from precisely such a tension in the culture between self-affirmative and self-destructive impulses. I shall have more to say about this subject in a later chapter. My contention at present is that, in the contrast of thought between Emerson and the dark romantics, we may perceive a divided stream much earlier than the one Walcutt defines. For the kind of generally pessimistic themes which in his view appears only at the dissolution of transcendentalism is, it seems to me, evident in Poe and Hawthorne; these are themes that lie at the root of nineteenth-century literary naturalism: man's doubts about the scientific

conquest of nature, the finitude of human reason, and man's inability to transcend nature itself and the demands of his body. More interested in attaining an abstract unity of man and nature, city and country, Emerson neglected this interrelation of ideas; he did not want to think of man as anything other than a species capable of supreme achievement, intellectual as well as spiritual. Before examining the sense in which Poe and Hawthorne are naturalists and thus more alert than Emerson to the schismatic tendencies in modern culture, it would be worthwhile to look briefly at Emerson's concept of science. Such an analysis will help us understand why, in the period of intensifying biological research between Lamarck and Darwin, an American writer of non-fiction could not reflect on the humiliating lesson of man's descent from a lower animal form.[10]

Emerson accepts the generally beneficent rôle of science but not without qualification. He insists, for example, that science is not the whole of knowledge, that it should not deny poetic vision, and that consequently it has only a "half-sight" of the truth. In his essay of 1836 on "Nature" he speaks of the need to humanise science :

> Nor has science sufficient humanity, so long as the naturalist [i.e., scientist of nature in Emerson's vocabulary] overlooks that wonderful congruity which subsists between man and the world; of which he is the lord, not because he is the most subtile inhabitant, but because he is its head and heart, and finds something of himself in every great and small thing, in every mountain stratum, in every new law of color, fact of astronomy, or atmospheric influence which observation or analysis lay open.[11]

Emerson's concept of science, as elaborated here, is evidently not modern, for he suggests that man is merely lord of nature and not its vanquisher. Indeed, he seems innocent of any suspicion that science may actually do harm to nature by dominating it, or that nature has a peculiar capacity for revenge. This observation should come as no surprise to anyone who recognises that the intellectual consciousness of the early radical Emerson was caught between Enlightenment and romantic allegiances, and therefore could embrace at once eighteenth-century optimism and early nineteenth-century theories of organic development.[12]

America, Emerson believed, could resist the ill effects of scientific and industrial progress which he had witnessed in Europe. There, in the old world, it had become obvious, with the relentless advances of technology, that man was being alienated from nature, which was now appropriated by science. Nevertheless, if some effects of this change were not already true of Emerson's America, they were certainly becoming true, since, despite transcendentalist optimism, nature would not re-establish itself as a basis for religion or morality. Because of the gift of reason, which raises him above the state of animals, man could always consider himself lord of nature; but the advent of science has enabled him to explore his domain more thoroughly and keep it largely in subjection. The problem attending such a transformation, of course, is that modern man does not suddenly turn into a wholly rational creature; he remains, to quote Bertrand Russell again, "a bundle of passions and instincts."

In view of these assumptions, what grounds are there for regarding Poe and Hawthorne as naturalists? To begin with, they inherited a romantic preoccupation with the relation between man and nature, but without a sense that nature is necessarily good. In fact, drawing so much on the Gothic tradition they were inclined to see nature as an amoral energy at once capable of beneficence, hostility, and indifference towards man. We remember that the Gothic romance typically portrays naturalistic forces indiscriminately loosed upon the world, forces which may assume the character of an objectification of the darker aspects of man's own physical nature. To the extent that man is animal and thus subject to the demands of his flesh, Poe and Hawthorne would seem to imply that he is essentially a part of nature, unable to transcend it. This, as I have insisted before, is one of the chief premises of naturalism. We may therefore legitimately invoke the concept of naturalism in our discussion of these artists because they, in common with others who follow in Europe and America, participate in a movement of ideas that was beginning to conceive of man as subject to nature rather than somehow above it.

But with Poe we have an immediate problem. How can we say or imply that Poe, this ostensible naturalist, has no faith in the transcendent, in things beyond nature, when so much evidence from his tales and poems attests to his fascination with an ineffable, otherworldly phantasmagoria? Yet we must not make the mistake of thinking that the mysterious and unexplained phenomena of Poe's universe are

objective supernatural forces. As in Hawthorne, and in the later European Gothic, the supernatural is naturalised and internalised, and thus assumes a dream-like quality. Moreover, the fact that Poe is more concerned with psychic explorations than with the symbolic possibilities of the real wilderness does not absolutely remove him from the company of the other great American romancers, Cooper and Melville. As Edwin Fussell points out, Poe was, we may reasonably judge, seeking a psychological equivalent of the American frontier.[13]

In Poe's fiction physical objects are invested with the power of symbol. D.H. Lawrence has remarked upon his emphasis on "matter," instead of character and life.[14] But this matter, far from being inert, is so thoroughly charged with the symbols of a physical state that it begins to live: the House of Usher, for instance, becomes virtually sentient at the moment of its collapse, capable even of "a long tumultuous shouting sound" (277).[15] As for the human figures Poe portrays in stories of secrets beyond the grave or of nervous disease, he reveals his technique of symbolisation by describing spiritual passion in terms of physical body, and establishes thereby a firm relation between these categories of being. When we encounter Roderick Usher, a man afflicted by acute hyperaesthesia and close to death, his self-destructive passion is implied through the narrator's fascinated account of his friend's physical decay and tempestuous Gothic appearance: "The now ghastly pallor of the skin, and the now miraculous lustre

of the eye, above all things startled and even awed me. The silken hair, too, had been suffered to grow all unheeded, and as, in its wild gossamer texture, it floated rather than fell about the face, I could not, even with effort, connect its Arabesque expression with any idea of simple humanity" (266). A conclusion we might draw from this illustration, one that could well be integrated into our developing concept of naturalism, is that the human being may transcend "simple humanity" but not nature itself.

Poe's central naturalistic principle is that physical nature is the one inescapable fact of human existence: life is disease and death. The grotesque horrors that characterise the fiction of his tales--those of insanity and severe nervous affection, premature burial, mesmerism, catalepsy--represent an effort to explore the neutral region between life and death, beyond rationality yet not beyond consciousness. It seems that, according to Poe's fantastic eschatology, man's spiritual essence may persist after the death of the body. Life, therefore, is a process of physical decay while the spirit craves release and realisation in death. But such a spirit remains indissolubly attached to the world in the sense that it expresses unrequited earthly passion.[16] In the tales of death Poe's typical heroines, Berenice, Morella, and Ligeia, are spirits of nature, beautifully strange and on the threshold of death; they have a spectral quality about them which appears to be more of a psychological projection or hallucination than a supernatural occurrence. Elsewhere in these tales death

is not so much of a challenging mystery as an ineluctable horror. In "The Masque of the Red Death" the theme of the fatality of flesh is embodied in a story about nature's revenge on those who would seek to deny it: Prince Prospero and his thousand courtiers, sequestered in unnaturally voluptuous surroundings, expect to escape the fury of the merciless pestilence that is laying waste their land; but among them appears the phantasm of death "shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave" and bearing "the countenance of a stiffened corpse" (387). This intangible form, a figuration of the Red Death, strikes dead each reveller one by one and establishes his rule of "Darkness and Decay" (388) over man's physical life.

If we are seeking a more precise definition of the kind of naturalism we find in Poe, we would do well to settle on a particular example of his work. "Ligeia" is, I think, an excellent illustration because, apart from being one of Poe's best and most characteristic tales, it explores the limits of extraordinary human passion, that natural passion which can only find fulfilment after the extinction of intellectual power. We have intimations of such a theme in "Morella" where the spiritual essence is referred to as the "principium individuationis" (153) which survives physical death and becomes in fact "a worm that would not die" (155).

From the point of view of plot, "Ligeia" is an ingenious study of metempsychosis, of a woman who, unwilling to remain dead,

spiritually takes possession of the dead body of her husband's second wife, Rowena, and arises from the bier. We even have evidence to suspect the degeneratively hyperaesthetic narrator of poisoning Rowena--the sort of attempted deception of the reader which Poe is entirely capable of engineering.[17] However, what I want to emphasise in the tale is the concept of "will" which we come to know through the character of Ligeia. She personifies a naturalistic will, an inexpugnable force below the level of rationally reflective consciousness, something surely akin to Schopenhauer's first principle of life, a source of knowledge by which we know that we will and feel. In his epigraph to "Ligeia," supposedly taken from Joseph Glanvill and quoted no fewer than three times in the text, Poe explains it thus: "And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is is a great will pervading all things by the nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (222). The last sentence here is evidently a clue to the moral which the narrator would like to see us glean from the story. God is to be understood, it seems, as the omnipotent strength of will that may triumph over the ordinary order of creation and even defy death. But to judge from the tale itself, we might prefer to say, taking up Joel Porte's suggestion, that the will triumphs <u>in</u> death and decay and makes "the corrupt dream come true."[18] It follows that Ligeia, the very embodiment of this power, should be immortal, unreal, a merely spiritual presence: "she came and departed as a

shadow" (222). The beauty of her face has "the radiance of an opium dream--an airy and spirit-lifting vision more wildly divine than the phantasies which hovered about the slumbering souls of the daughters of Delos" (223). Now whether or not she is a figment of the narrator's erotic imagination, she does appear to us as an irrational force, a figure of romance: "Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion" (225). Such passion, of course, is the primary manifestation of naturalistic will, primitive and irreducible. When we think about this goddess Ligeia, at once spiritual and sensual, we might recall the numerous men and women whom we encounter in Dante's Hell, who, although physically dead, still retain the most vital part of their psychological being, their passions. There can be no more vivid example of this condition than the pitiable situation of Francesca and Paolo in Canto V of the Inferno, two souls everlastingly linked together as a penalty for consummating their illegal desire for one another on earth. But the case of these two lovers is different in the sense that they participate in the vast medieval cosmological scheme; whereas Ligeia and her husband are born into a world wherein nature is a meaningless struggle for existence and leaves man alone with his irrational impulses, unsupported by any traditional moral discipline.

The world that Ligeia inhabits in life is portrayed in a poem (226-7) composed by her before her death, an allegory in which angels

sit in a theatre and watch the tragedy of man, "A play of hopes and fears." The mimes are described as:

> Mere puppets they, who come and go
> At bidding of vast formless things
> That shift the scenery to and fro,
> Flapping from out their Condor wings
> Invisible Wo!

It seems to me that the human actors in the drama are the puppets of nature, rather than of God, and that the dark powers of nature constitute "the soul of the plot"--"Madness," "Sin," and "Horror." In the penultimate stanza the "Conqueror Worm" emerges to bring about the inevitable tragedy of man's life. A physical thing must suffer physical decay:

> But see, amid the mimic rout,
> A crawling shape intrude!
> A blood-red thing that writhes from out
> The scenic solitude!
> It writhes!--it writhes!--with mortal pangs
> The mimes become its food
> And the seraphs sob at vermin fangs
> In human gore imbued.

Clearly, this is Ligeia's metaphor for her rather dismal appreciation of human mortality. But so powerful is her passion that, even as she submits to the Conqueror, she invokes Glanvill's lines and prepares herself to face death with an exertion of will. Such is Poe's grand fiction: the possibility of a disembodied human passion, a heart without a body.

Passing from Poe to Hawthorne, we become aware of a much fuller context within which American naturalism may be defined. To start with, the traditional Gothic association of human sensibility and natural landscape is closer in Hawthorne,[19] and so too are his symbols

more charged with historical, cultural, and moral import. His symbolic awareness, indeed his spirit of romance, springs from the intellectual milieu of mid-nineteenth-century New England. We recognise that this milieu harbours a residue of the Puritan ethic, and in Hawthorne's work we see something of the Puritan faculty of regarding physical objects as primarily figurations of spiritual and emotional states. We may therefore suggest that, for Hawthorne at least, the residual Puritan consciousness was conducive to the practice of romance: this much we know already and have known since Henry James told us that the "distinguished mark" of Hawthorne was "that feeling for the latent romance of New England."[20] But I now want to advance the proposition that it was also conducive to a kind of literary naturalism, given that naturalism, like romance, insists on a symbolic pattern where emotionality carries the weight of meaning. It bears underlining that there do exist certain differences between the thoroughgoing naturalism of Zola and the "romance naturalism" of Hawthorne (and of Poe too, since he falls within such a generalisation), differences in theme and technique. However, if we are limiting the comparison to one of technique, and in particular symbolist technique, the difference may be one of degree, for undoubtedly the American romance places greater emphasis on the power of the symbol. The significance of this observation should become more apparent when we come to discuss Zola's metaphors for human passion in novels like Thérèse Raquin, La Curée, and Germinal. At any rate, in Hawthorne's world the operative truth is decidedly located in the symbol, whose total meaning derives from the emotional situation of the individual and the moral situation of the community.[21]

In Hawthorne, as in Poe and consistent with the tradition of Gothic and naturalistic literature, nature becomes a series of symbolic figures for psychological states. The narrator of The Marble Faun illustrates this process of symbolisation when he stresses that for Miriam the face of the dead monk, the tormentor whom she helped to murder, will remain forever in her memory: "It [the face] was a symbol, perhaps, of the deadly iteration with which she was doomed to behold the image of her crime reflected back upon her, in a thousand ways, and converting the great calm face of Nature, in the whole, and its innumerable details, into a manifold reminiscence of that one dead visage" (IV, 190).[22] I noted earlier that Hawthorne, distinct from Poe, tends to invest his symbols with historical, cultural, and moral significance; yet it is evident, from the above quotation as from everywhere else in his fiction, that the moral element predominates and is persistently emblematised in physical nature. As Emerson has commented, all nature is infused with moral purpose: "This ethical character so penetrates the bone and marrow of nature, as to seem the end for which it was made."[23]

Very often, it appears, in Hawthorne's tales it is the effect of modern science on the relation between man and nature that introduces the moral dimension.[24] This theme may be conceived as an elaboration and development of Poe's preoccupation with the fatality of nature, but containing no promise of transcendent spirituality: we witness the spectacle of a man who attempts to dominate the turbid chaos of nature by arrogant detachment from it and the pitiless application of scientific reason. In "The Birth-mark," for example, the antagonism

of science and nature manifests itself through the character of Aylmer, who seeks not only to know the mysterious natural order of creation, as was Faust's desire, but also to control it. Representing what one critic has called the "overreaching, over-intellectualized, and overspiritualized aspects of science,"[25] Aylmer is unwilling to recognise that nature "permits us indeed to mar, but seldom to mend, and like a jealous patentee, on no account to make" (X, 42). So when, by dint of scientific energy, he succeeds in removing his wife's natural blemish, he does it only at the expense of her life. "Thus ever," concludes the tale, "does the gross Fatality of Earth in its inevitable triumph over immortal essence, which, in this dim sphere of half-development, demands the completeness of a higher state" (X, 56).

An even better instance of the effort to generate a scientific alternative to nature may be found in "Rappaccini's Daughter"--better, that is, from our point of view, since the story establishes a deep contrast between the authenticity of real human emotion and real physical nature on the one hand, and the falsity of science's claim to secular omnipotence on the other. Presiding over a kind of inverted Eden, Rappaccini seems far more of an invidious presence in the world than Aylmer. In "Rappaccini's Daughter" Hawthorne's theme moves once again beyond merely that of the perversion of nature, as treated by such artists as Spenser and Milton,[26] and touches on the extent to which the scientific conquest of nature imperils man's very existence. But in this

case the heroine, though still as pure of heart as Aylmer's wife Georgiana, plays the rôle of "la belle empoisonneuse" whose innocent humanity is sacrificed for her father's unnatural research. She becomes, therefore, "the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature, and of the fatality that attends all such efforts of perverted wisdom" (X, 128).

The atmosphere of sin, guilt, and atonement that pervades Hawthorne's tales and romances is inseparably related to the theme of man's estrangement from nature, from the physical landscape that surrounds him as much as from his own body. The Puritan is shown to be afraid of these dual aspects of nature and builds his city of God in a rationally controllable region outside the forest and outside human passion. Yet despite all the resources of civilised religion and the strenuous application of conscience, man cannot make such a denial without sacrificing his natural freedom (that is, freedom to be determined by nature). Hawthorne, consistent with naturalistic faith, would seek to restore the balance of nature in man by reminding him of his animal origins and of the fact that, his reason and religion notwithstanding, there remains a part of him that is still animal. This is Hawthorne's intuitive evolutionism. In his last major work the romancer raises his concern about man's original animality to the level of direct reference, persistently fixing the reader's attention on the primitive unity of man and nature, as embodied in the youth Donatello and symbolised by Praxiteles' statue of the Marble Faun, half man

and half beast: "The animal nature . . . is a most essential part of the Faun's composition, for the characteristics of brute creation meet and combine with those of humanity, in this strange, yet true and natural conception of antique poetry and art" (IV,10). Of course, Donatello, the reincarnated Faun, loses his innocence as the story progresses, and in assuming his share of postlapsarian guilt realises the modern Fatality of Earth.

The Scarlet Letter is beyond question Hawthorne's most thorough and aesthetically satisfying exploration of the thwarted relation between man and nature. What I want to do in the following discussion is prove, in the context of naturalism, that the story of Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth constitutes a romance of physical passion. Now apparently this may be difficult to accomplish, since the passions in the romance are not portrayed as physical. The carnal act from which the whole drama of the book proceeds is barely alluded to, although it must have a powerful presence in the consciousness of the three principal characters. Indeed, seeking the ontological status of the characters, we can only conclude that not one of them is flesh and blood. They are emblems of various moral states. Henry James says as much in his evaluation of The Scarlet Letter:

> The people strike me not as characters, but as representatives, very picturesquely arranged, of a single state of mind; and the interest of the story lies, not in them, but in the situation, which is insistently kept before us, with little progression, though with a great deal, as I have said, of a certain stable variation; and to which

> they, out of their reality, contribute little that helps it to live and move.[27]

If we were given a substantial and less shadowy impression of Hester's and Dimmesdale's adultery--"a sin of passion, not of principle" (I, 200)--then the story would be more solidly realistic and perhaps more firmly based in socio-historical context. But if that were so, of course, it would no longer be a romance. As it stands, The Scarlet Letter belongs to the domain of dream, not to the world of the documentary or historical novel.

Even though the characters seem to lack flesh and blood, we come to know their physical nature through their relation to the landscape, which has emblematic importance, representing the underside of man's consciousness. According to Puritan superstition, which Hawthorne dramatises, the forest is a moral wilderness populated by the souls of the guilty and sinful. It is the home of the Black Man and the Red Man, the devil who tempts man to unspeakable crime and the savage who signifies the terrible excesses of human passion and the unholy mysteries of the flesh. So, from the forest significantly, the medicine man Chillingworth emerges to claim the morally diseased soul of Dimmesdale. His surmise about the latter, that he "hath inherited a strong animal nature" (I, 180), is doubtless correct, for it was just such a nature that precipated Dimmesdale into his sin. The physician, this "deformed old figure, with a face that haunted men's memories longer than they liked" (I, 175), has a demonic aspect that connects him, physically as well as spiritually, with the long tradition of

darkly obsessed heroes: the classical Mephistopheles, Milton's Satan, Melville's Ahab, and to a certain extent Hardy's Michael Henchard. As a natural man, he is a negative type of Natty Bumppo, and in that respect serves to underscore the moral equivocality of nature.

Hester too, in a metaphorical sense, springs from the forest. Although she suffers without demur the austere judgement of her community and its religion, she preserves in her character a quietly defiant feeling of freedom and an appreciable passionateness which suggest her relation to the wild landscape beyond the town. The physical situation of the cottage where she lives, on the outskirts of the town yet facing the forested hills of the west (I, 81), corresponds precisely to her moral situation in life. The fact of Hester's sympathetic affiliation with nature is dwellt on repeatedly throughout the romance, but nowhere so explicitly as in the passage that considers the similarity between her native lawlessness and the forest in which she meets Dimmesdale:

> She had wandered, without rule of guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest, amid the gloom of which they were now holding a colloquy that was to decide their fate. Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticizing all with hardly more reverance than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. The tendency of her fate and fortunes had been to set her free.(I, 199)

Hester's sin, the fatality of her physical nature, has made her free; it has reconciled her to the forest, which is the matrix of all humanity.

It is well to give some more thought to the scenes in the forest, since they bring the naturalistic theme into clearer relief than any other episode in the book. The emotional bond between Hester and the surrounding nature establishes itself through imagery first of all. Hawthorne's evocation of the mystery of this primeval landscape takes its spirit from the very hopelessness of Hester's endeavour and assumes an evidently allegorical character: "The sportive light--feebly sportive, at best, in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene--withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright" (I, 183). A little later when Hester, in the most sensuous gesture of the romance, unclasps her hair and allows it to flow over her shoulders, sunshine suddenly bursts through the gloom: "Such was the sympathy of Nature--that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth--with the bliss of these two spirits!" (I, 203). But their bliss does not last long, and Hester's hopeful suggestion that they escape from human law into the great American wilderness raises only a sad doubt in Dimmesdale. Hawthorne's lovers are caught in the baleful no-man's land between the static, prohibitive community and natural freedom. Thus, just as Chase defines American fiction, the

conditions of the dilemma remain unresolved: like Hepzibah and Clifford in The House of the Seven Gables, indeed like Huck Finn or the narrator of Typee, those who glimpse the passion and freedom of nature must return to the bosom of civilisation.[28] Yet Dimmesdale and Hester, radically determined by how they conceive of their sin of passion, will not expect final absolution from their community: the former makes his public confession and dies, a martyr to his swollen conscience; the latter carries her penitence to the grave, but such is her original spirit that she manages to internalise significance of the letter on her breast and thereby liberate herself from the laws of her society--"the world's law was no law for her mind" (I, 164). By the end of the romance the letter A has so changed in its objective moral significance that it now realises ironically the very reverse of its original intention, no longer a symbol of shame but an honourable heraldic escutcheon.

Whereas Dimmesdale and Hester attain natural freedom through their different means--he in confession and death, she in sober resignation--their daughter is freedom itself. Pearl belongs wholly to the forest and not in the least to the town: "the mother-forest, and the wild things which it nourished, all recognized a kindred wildness in the human child" (I, 205). An offspring of sin, unamenable to rules, she symbolises very palpably the naturalness and lawlessness which her mother understands but contains and her father tries to deny. However, Hawthorne allows

us to perceive in Pearl's rôle not a little irony; for evidently she is herself an aspect of Puritanism. Diligently, on every possible occasion, she reminds her parents of the significance of the letter and of the responsibility they bear. The identification of Pearl with the sin that created her seems obvious when, for example, we are told that her gorgeously contrived tunic is as much an expression of her mother's love as an emblem of her mother's guilt: "It was the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life!" (I.102). As an unconscious representative of Puritan law, then, Pearl smashes through it, challenges it with the "life" given her by two sinning Puritans. Harry Levin suggests that we may pursue Pearl's further adventures in the novels of Henry James,[29] but I believe she would be more likely to appear in the fiction of Zola.

Pearl's absolute acceptance of her physical nature, her delight in disorder, is her declaration of emotional and intellectual independence from the moral claims of the community. For her, as indeed for her mother ultimately, there can be no "sin" of the flesh because nature is the essential determinant, something that resists ethical codification. Hawthorne would argue that the flesh or the earth is fatal only insofar as one attempts to deny it by the presumptuous application of reason and its canonised forms, science and society; in fact those very human institutions which Emerson believed could be unified in nature. Poe, of course, less concerned with bringing civilisation and sexuality face to face,

manages to depict the purely natural forces in the universe which define our mortality and defeat our reason. But despite any differences in vision and technique, I think we have established a context in which these artists, the symbolist and the allegorist we might say, may be considered naturalistic or as embodying strong naturalistic elements. After all, what they have in common is an ideology which lies at the heart of naturalism: a sense that no human discipline will conquer nature.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. The presence of the West in the American romantic imagination has been comprehensively defined in Edwin Fussell's Frontier: American Literature and the American West (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965).

2. A lengthy discussion of precisely this problem is Quentin Anderson's The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

3. D.H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (London: Martin Secker, 1924), p. 52.

4. Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (London: G.Bell & Sons, 1958), pp. ix, 1.

5. Harold Bloom, "Emerson: The Glory and Sorrows of American Romanticism," in Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities, ed. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1973), p. 155.

6. Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Complete Works, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-04), I, 370.

7. For a study of Emerson's views on the relations between city and wilderness, see Michael H. Cowan, City of the West: Emerson, America, and Urban Metaphor, Yale Publications in American Studies, 13 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967); and also Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 229-42.

8. Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 10.

9. Ibid., p. 12.

10. Emerson did arrive at an evolutionary view of nature, albeit a rather vague and poetic one. The Origin of Species apparently made no impression on him. See Joseph Warren Beach's discussion of Emerson and evolution in The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry (New York: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 336-45.

11. Emerson, I, 68.

12. Some recent support of this view may be found in Carl M. Lindner, "Newtonianism in Emerson's Nature," Emerson Society Quarterly, 20 (1974), 261.

13. Fussell, op. cit., p. 170.

14. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 72.

15. Page numbers refer to Volume I of The Complete Poems and Stories of

Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn and Edward H. O'Neill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

16. Francis Russell Hart, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, has insisted that this unrequited passion constitutes the most essential trait of the Gothic character. See his "Experience of Character in the English Gothic Novel," in Experience in the Novel: Selected Papers of the English Institute, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 83-105.

17. This aspect of the tale has been elaborately analysed by G.F. Thompson in Poe's Fiction (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), pp. 77-87.

18. Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1969), p. 70.

19. See Jane Lundblad, Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Tradition of Gothic Romance, Essays and Studies in American Language and Literature, 4 (Upsala: A.-b. Lundequistska Bokhandeln; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1946).

20. Henry James, "Nathaniel Hawthorne," in A Library of the World's Best Literature, ed. Charles Dudley Warner (New York: International Society, 1896-7), XVIII, 7053-4.

21. Charles Feidelson, Jr., speaks of the truth in the symbol as a general fact of American romanticism and arrives at the principle that "symbolism is at once technique and theme"; see his Symbolism in American Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), p.43.

22. Volume and page numbers refer to The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, 11 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1962-74).

23. Emerson, I, 41.

24. An excellent and thorough investigation of Hawthorne's use of contemporary science and pseudo-science is Taylor Stoer's Hawthorne's Mad Scientists (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978).

25. H. Bruce Franklin, "Hawthorne and Science Fiction," The Centennial Review, 10 (1966), 119.

26. For an assessment of possible paradigmatic sources for this tale, see Robert Daly, "Fideism and the Allusive Mode in 'Rappaccini's Daughter,'" Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 28 (1973), 26-30.

27. Henry James, Hawthorne (London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 90.

28. As Richard Poirier argues, "American writers are at some point always forced to return their characters to prison. They return them to 'reality' from environments where they have been most 'nakedly' allowed to exist, environments created by various kinds of ingenuity." A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 29.

29. Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 78.

CHAPTER THREE

Realism as Distinct from Naturalism

These discussions about the naturalistic qualities in Gothic literature and American romanticism have taken for granted a fairly firm distinction between the traditions of naturalism and the novel. Where naturalism occurs in literature the common ideological assumptions of the novel, particularly that man is essentially a social being, are absent. Now the distinction holds because of naturalism's implicit association with the modern romance, whose opposition to the novel has become something of a critical axiom. And the romancers themselves have long been aware of the difference between the two genres, as we know from the pronouncements of such writers as Clara Reeve and Hawthorne.[1] The more provocative idea, of course, is that naturalism may be a continuation of the romance, that it has the power to assimilate the romance to the conditions of the scientific age. But tempting as this suggestion may be, I would prefer not to develop it since it inevitably entails considerable exploration of the origin and nature of romance, a detour that could not promote our economy of purpose. At any rate, the capitally important premise here is that whereas the fiction of the traditional European novel is realistic, the fiction of naturalism is not. We should remember that the premise obtains even when we speak loosely of something called the naturalistic novel.

It is often said that naturalism in the nineteenth century, especially in France during the seventies and eighties, represents a logical extension of the realism of Stendhal and Balzac, part of a strict historical line of development To be sure, the two movements have a certain amount in common: they both respond to the industrial and scientific revolution, both affirm the decline of transcendental values. Although many critics, as I intend to stress later, conceive of naturalism as a species of realism or as an elaboration of some of the fundamental tendencies in realism, I see no such explicit continuity. So widespread a critical misconception deserves a whole chapter to defeat. It has done nothing to contribute towards an appreciation of naturalism as an independent tradition in literature.

What, then, is this realism which must be radically distinguished from naturalism? Realism in modern philosophy refers to the view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense perception. It is usually differentiated from idealism, which views material objects as contingent on our knowledge or consciousness of them. In retrospect, Plato's doctrine of ideas may be considered a kind of realism since it attributes the origin of the objects of sense perception to a higher reality. Much of Christian thought, too, could be called realist, especially at the time of the Middle Ages when reality was conceived as a thoroughly unitary system; man's station was fixed in the order of creation and he was aware of his existence inasmuch as he was connected with God. Literary realism accords with the established philosophical model in the sense that it

posits an objective universe, fully knowable and in which man has a certain place in the scheme of things. But the scheme here is largely social; that is to say, man in the realist novel is depicted in society, instead of in nature. Society is understood as the primary objective force, a node of social, economic, and moral influences by which man's fate is determined. Given this definition, therefore, it should come as no surprise that I am more inclined to accept as canonical the theory of Lukács than that of, say, Champfleury and Duranty, the _soi-disant_ realists of the mid nineteenth century.

Needless to say, the novel--French, English, and Russian particularly--is the completest fictional expression of the integral relation between man and society, which has been an immemorial preoccupation of European thought. We remember, for instance, that in Plato's _Republic_ the state is an incarnation of the character of man on a grander scale, and so the philosopher represents Socrates as studying the ideal man through an ideal society. It is this time-honoured assumption of an indissoluble bond between man and his social environment that characterises the realist novel, informs its theme, and constitutes its visionary awareness, its ideology. For ultimately realism is an ideology, in the same way that romanticism and naturalism are. By no means is realism merely an aesthetic of truth-telling.

Among certain critics, however, there prevails a notion that realism is not so much an ideology as a technique, a method of representing reality. Ian Watt, for instance, contends that "the novel's realism

does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it."[2] And more recently J.P. Stern has said of realism: "It is not a genre, nor a Weltanschauung, but rather a disposition of mind and pen, something like a humour--in brief a mode of writing" (his emphasis).[3] Although I do not intend to dwell very long on the question of "realistic" technique, I think it worthwhile to consider for a moment narrative style as a means of promoting the illusion of reality. One characteristic of realism is its reliance on the firm control of the worldly-wise narrator, who indulges in rhetorical commentary on the events or characters of the novel in the first or third person, thus inducing the desired attitude within the reader. He employs what has been called "the epic privilege of comment and generalization,"[4] assumes a presiding rational consciousness, in order to make sense of the events in the novel and raise it above a simple record of detail. It may be argued that narrative interposition of this kind, whose primary model is to be found in Tom Jones, jeopardises the order of imaginative reality which the realist novel is supposed to protect in the name of impersonality. Aristotle shows himself familiar with the problem in his discussion of Homer in the Poetics:

> Homer, admirable as he is in every other respect, is especially so in this, that he alone among epic poets is not unaware of the part to be played by the poet himself in the poem. The poet should say very little in propria persona, as he is no imitator when doing that.[5]

Of course, a critic's or a novelist's answer to the whole question of the extent to which narrative intrusion is permissible in the realist

novel will depend on his commitment to stylistic objectivity. To make his point he might compare two so-called realist authors and determine how much one "tells" and the other "shows." In this connection, the comparison between Thackeray and Flaubert is an old favourite.[6] For his part, Henry James is of the Flaubert school of objectivity: "The art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself, . . . the thing has to look true, and that is all. It is not made to look true by simple statement."[7] Curiously enough, Stendhal enunciated approximately the same doctrine more than half a century earlier: "il faut que celui qui conte soit la glace qu'on met sur une gravure: on voit tout à travers et on ne la voit pas."[8] The author "shows" the truth without drawing the reader's attention to his presence. But, as we know, and as he later admitted, Stendhal could never fulfil this celebrated ideal. Like Balzac, he felt he was capable of imitating reality, maintaining the illusion of reality, even at the expense of sylistic objectivity and impersonality. To be sure, he did always use a mirror, but it was very carefully and obviously angled.

According to T.S. Eliot, the objectivity of nineteenth-century fiction is guaranteed not so much by the presence of independent material objects as by the presence of more than one consciousness. The realism of fiction, he says, is the realism of intersubjectivity. In an essay called "In Memory of Henry James" Eliot recognises that the real hero of James's novels is a "collectivity"; he goes on to say

that James can find a novel in Browning's The Ring and the Book because it presents the same events from many points of view.[9] If Eliot had sought a truly consummate example of intersubjectivity in English realism he might have seized on George Eliot's Middlemarch. In that novel the collective mind co-operates with an intrusive narrator to equip the reader with a particular moral perspective. For example, the prospect of Dorothea Brooke's marrying such a person as Casaubon is presented to us in two ways, through the judgements of various people and through the narrator's implicit assessment of the quality of the scholar's life. Mrs. Cadwallader takes demonic delight in discovering the truth to Sir James Chettam, who expresses his indignation as a disappointed rival: "Good God! It is horrible! He is no better than a mummy!"[10] Sir James's and Mrs. Cadwallader's response, set against Dorothea's own impression of Casaubon, suggests not only how little the world understands him, but also how little the world understands her. George Eliot makes it clear that, despite the comments on Casaubon by persons of limited understanding, Dorothea's solitary courage in the devotion she offers is partly justified. She is certainly more alert to the possibility of greatness than most of the dull people of Middlemarch. Intersubjectivity, the subtle fusion of "showing" and "telling," the harmony of what Ian Watt calls realism of presentation and the realism of assessment, are the keynotes of George Eliot's technique. Despite these artificial devices, we perceive her moral purpose and accept its validity; and as long as we do not trip over the stage properties, we are prepared to believe in her total dramatic illusion.

The point about this detour into the sphere of narrative technique is that the illusion advanced in realist fiction--by means of showing or telling or both--is the revelation of truth, a much higher truth than that of a character's or an event's closeness to reality. Neither fidelity to fact nor any other purely technical criterion may be conceived as the definitive measure of the realism in a given work. For realism, to stress the argument again, is an ideology, a way of seeing the world, and it is on that ground that we can most easily recognise its contrast with naturalism. Certainly, the realist artist aims towards "the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experience of individuals,"[11] yet these individuals we know to be situated at a particular locus of space and time. So the realist is concerned with the specific historical reality, which he undertakes to represent and; more importantly, interpret. In the words of Boris Suchov, "It fell to realist art to fill the speculative and abstract conception of historical process with real objective content, thereby answering the most essential spiritual demands of the time."[12]

Responding to such spiritual demands, the original movement of French realism was anchored to a moment in history which belonged to the generation of 1830. Its characters were unaware of the destiny that awaited them: as Alfred de Musset says, "devant eux l'aurore d'un immense horizon, les premières clartés de l'avenir."[13] Only in terms of their situation in a specific time and place, the given historical reality, are these characters made intelligible to us.

Thus Julien Sorel in Le Rouge et le noir is conceived in a vital relationship with the France of the Restoration. Similarly, Balzac, applying the methods of Scott to his contemporary society, places the action of most of his fiction in the changing social scene after the fall of Napoleon. Later realists maintain a comparable association between the life of the hero and the historical process. Flaubert is careful to relate the love affair of Frederic Moreau in L'Education sentimentale to the revolutionary events of 1848. The difference between the generations in Turgenev's Fathers and Children is characterised by the main current of liberal thought in Russia at the time, nihilism. And, of course, the dramas of Tolstoy's War and Peace take place in the context of the period of Russian history before, during, and after the Napoleonic invasion of 1812.

According to Auerbach, "the serious realism of modern times cannot represent man otherwise than as embedded in a total reality, political, social, and economic, which is concrete and constantly evolving."[14] The heroes of the realist novel are therefore somehow expected to embody the full quantum of this total reality. A product of various historical forces, the hero becomes enlarged, that is to say, larger than life. Into this figure particularly the realist stuffs his ideology. We are now at the stage of the argument where we may properly introduce the idea of the "type," the single most important device that the realist employs in his portrayal of character. Schelling used the term "type" to describe the universal

figure of mythical proportions: for instance, Hamlet, Falstaff, Don Quixote, or Faust.[15] But it may also have the sense of "social type," replacing the older "caractère," which had begun to assume the meaning of individual character and lose its association with Theophrastus and La Bruyère. In his "Avant-Propos" to the Comédie humaine Balzac presents himself as a student of social types. His scientific classification of types is comparable to zoological varieties among the lower animals. Two critics have noticed that Marche-à-Terre, the Breton peasant in Les Chouans is related fifty times to animals.[16] Thus social conditions and the sort of quasi-nature they produce contribute to shape a man's character--a social animal, almost literally. The objects that surround a person and typify him are informed by social reality, rather as, in a different kind of fiction, the objects surrounding one of Poe's doomed figures are informed by extreme physical states. Balzac can say in effect: "Tell me what you possess and I will tell you what you think." For him, as for all true realists, the type is a literary device that enables him to create an individual who yet has universal significance.

The notion of typicality as it bears on realism is not difficult to define theoretically, especially if we taken our text from Lukács. He asserts that great realism should depict man and society in an organic relation such that man becomes a representative of his society, a type:

> The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the

> particular both in characters and situations. What makes a type a type is not its average quality. . . . What makes it a type is that all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs.[17]

A "realistic" fictional character is typical insofar as it represents a single node of various forces operating within the culture, some of them morally and socially contradictory. But surely this definition limits the dimensions of the novel to a circumscribed point in space and time: not so, argues Lukács. Taking Balzac as his most perfect model he explains that "What he did was to depict the typical characters of his own time, while enlarging them to dimensions so gigantic as in the reality of a capitalist world can never pertain to single human beings, only to social forces."[18]

If we look more closely at the example of Balzac, arguably the greatest of all realists, we may marshal enough evidence to make the contrast between realism and naturalism more vivid, a contrast which finally reduces itself to one between the social and the natural. The universe of the Comédie humaine is distended beyond belief. All the chaotic energies of God's monstrous creation are loosed on every conceivable type in the social organism. We encounter characters that appear to be the product of a profoundly cynical imagination, not so comic or benign as Dickens' could be. Eugène de Rastignac arrives in Paris with his family's savings to seek his fortune at any cost, and probes the gloomy, filthy depths of the metropolis until his nerves are steeled and his pockets filled;

Baron Hulot d'Ervy will see his wife and children starving and disgraced before giving up Mme. Marneffe; Countess Ferrau repudiates her husband when he appears beggared and crippled at her door, after having been thought killed at the battle of Eylau; Lucien de Rubempré tries to become a great poet in Paris, but bleeds his sister and brother-in-law to pay for his iniquities, and eventually hangs himself in a debtors' prison. The list is endless. Now these characters are very palpably individuals, yet they are also ideas. Ideas of what? Of nothing less than the symptoms of a diseased age, a moral and physical wretchedness that we recognise in the form of persistent motifs: miserliness, debauchery, avarice, monomania, and so on.

Balzac's characters achieve the level of idea or concept by virtue of their association with the world around them, the social and physical environment. The peculiar attention that Balzac devotes to the social and physical environment particularly is what distinguishes him from the naturalists. He approaches his subject from an exclusively external point of view, accumulating material details that may be en harmonie with the character. According to Hippolyte Taine, who has systematised Balzac's realism into a kind of logic, the novelist's technique is first to examine the town, street, and house, in which the character lives, followed by the façade, structure, and overall appearance of the house; then he would look at the distribution of rooms, their furniture and decoration. The clothes of each principal character would be described in relation to his physical bearing. A person's history would embrace his

origin, ideas, habits, and above all his financial position, from which we learn his social milieu and tastes. Only after this long and extraordinary elaboration, whose most frequently cited illustration is the first few pages of Eugénie Grandet or Le Père Goriot, will Balzac enter into the characters themselves.[19]

Let us, for a moment, take the single example of Balzac's introductory descriptions in Eugénie Grandet and compare them with the scene that the naturalist Zola evokes at the start of Thérèse Raquin. The difference is absolutely crucial. Evidently Balzac places far greater emphasis on physical environment than Zola does, for he believes that a person's surroundings explain him as much as he explains them. Such a reciprocity of influences is reinforced by the commanding presence of an independent narrative voice, by which device the author can help us make the required connections. Guiding us through the melancholy provincial town of Saumur, he carefully relates the condition of the old houses to the passage of social history, the transference of power from the aristocracy to the mercantile bourgeoisie. Against this background we approach Grandet's house--Grandet, the successful commerçant, whose temperament is as dark and cold as his house:

> Après avoir suivi les détours de ce chemin pittoresque dont les moindres accidents réveillent des souvenirs et dont l'effet général tend à plonger dans une sorte de rêverie machinale, vous apercevez un renfoncement assez sombre, au centre duquel est cachée la porte de la maison à monsieur Grandet. Il est impossible de comprendre la valeur de cette expression provinciale sans donner la biographie de monsieur Grandet.[20]

And so we are immersed in a relatively lengthy description of Grandet's rise to economic supremacy through his capacity to prosper under changing political régimes, of his physical bearing (Balzac's celebrated physiognomy) and family and the very few friends he has. All these disparate details are understood to be necessary to explain the personality of Grandet, which is a complex totality of socio-economic forces. It is a moment in history. Thus when the narrator once again, a few pages later, picks up the idea of "la maison à monsieur Grandet," we are ready to accept it as a representation of no less than the old man's personality and its place in history: "Il est maintenant facile de comprendre toute la valeur de ce mot, la maison à monsieur Grandet, cette maison pâle, froide, silencieuse, située en haut de la ville, et abritée par les ruines des remparts."[21]

Thérèse Raquin may be thought to make a good comparison with Eugénie Grandet, since it does begin with the description of a specific urban milieu which relates in some way to the characters of the story. Yet, on the contrary, there is nothing in Zola's opening pages to encourage us to form the sort of social, historical, and economic connections that we are accustomed to make with Balzac; there is nothing here of Balzac's connotative strength, and without benefit of narrative interposition we are left to judge for ourselves the symbolic significance of each physical quality. Only later, when we come to know the characters central to the plot, do we recognise the appositness of the portrayal of the Passage du

Pont-Neuf, a dull, dark, and humid place, almost threatening: "Par les beaux jours d'été, quand un lourd soleil brûle les rues, une clarté blanchâtre tombe des vitres sales et traîne misérablement dans le passage. Par les vilains jours d'hiver, par les matinées de brouillard, les vitres ne jettent que de la nuit sur les dalles gluantes, de la nuit salie et ignoble" (I, 525). The true import of this gloomy picture eventually fulfils itself in relation to the physical nature of the personages whom we have yet to meet. So words like "sales," "misérablement," and "ignoble" may be conceived as morally prophetic; they scarcely attain the status of Balzac's "pâle, froide, silencieuse," which, set against the painstakingly detailed background of Grandet's life and times, participate in a palpable social reality.

Assuredly, Zola's manner of introducing his tale has nothing intrinsically naturalistic about it. What such a contrast between Thérèse Raquin and Eugénie Grandet brings out is the relative significance of context. The realist fiction of Balzac, we have established, depends for its intelligibility on the interaction at every aesthetic level--from theme to single word--of man and society: a man is real only to the extent that he is part of a social context. In the naturalistic fiction of Zola the single descriptive word or image is not invariably and immediately related to any particular context. The first few pages yield no evidence of a broad social, historical, economic context. As we read further, however, and observe the events and characters we do become aware of a very general context,

that of man's irrepressible physical nature and physical passions. From this domain society is necessarily excluded, as we have seen that it was in the amoral nature of Gothic literature and of Poe and Hawthorne.

A student of Balzac might question my confident exclusion of nature from the Comédie humaine on the score that Balzac implies no fundamental distinction between nature and society: society is nature. Indeed, the animal and social worlds seem remarkably close at times. And have I not already pointed out Balzac's technique of deliberately confusing social with zoological types? Clearly, though, the references to animal species such as we find in Les Chouans are metaphorical in kind and serve to emphasise a character's state of moral health. It is, after all, ultimately a human jungle that we are admitted to in the Comédie humaine, full of social animals. When Balzac conceives of humanity as divisible according to species he means according to rôle in society. An excellent instance of this sort of obsessive socio-zoological classification is Le Cousin Pons. Pons himself is a species or type of poor relation and eternal victim of other people's malice; Schmucke and Brunner are German types; La Cibot and her husband are types of concierges; Fraisier and Poulain are types of professional men; Gaudissart is a type of arriviste; M. de Marville is a type of henpecked husband. In all, more than a dozen characters in the novel may be considered specific social representatives, most of them monomaniacs. The fixed idea that pervades the story is the destruction of Pons; this aim La Cibot undertakes to

accomplish personally, but in her own way. "Elle ne le tuerait pas," says Fraisier to Mme. de Marville, "elle ne lui donnera pas d'arsenic, elle ne sera pas si charitable, elle fera pis, elle l'assassinera moralement,"[22] just as the Cointet brothers set out to destroy and dispossess David Séchard in Illusions perdues. The moral murderer, predator though he or she may be, is very obviously a creation of human society.

It could be said that the morality in the Comédie humaine is as arbitrary and uncontrolled as the amoral and deterministic nature of any naturalistic work. The absence of a moral order in Balzac has aroused the criticism of at least one other great artist in the nineteenth-century realist tradition. Henry James concedes that Balzac has the capacity to convey truth through character and transmute reality into art, but complains of the novelist's lack of moral control: "When we approach Balzac we seem to enter into a great temperament--a prodigious nature. . . . He had no natural sense of morality, and this we cannot help thinking a fault in a novelist."[23] Whether a novelist of any kind needs a natural sense of morality is a question that we can afford to set aside here; yet we cannot ignore the truth of James's observation about Balzac. Unlike James himself or Dickens, Balzac does not infuse his work with a moral ideal which the virtuous man or woman may attain. As far as he is concerned, amid the root and branch corruption of his society, he sees the only moral mainstay not in human beings but in the traditional institutions of family, church, and monarchy. So, even though unconstrained by

that natural sense of morality, Balzac does establish his fiction within the boundaries of conventional society, wherein any struggle towards a higher moral plane is foredoomed by man's compulsive passions. These passions, we must recognise, do not immediately spring from nature but are implanted and nurtured by the social situation.

The decline of realism in the nineteenth-century bears witness to man's changing conceptions of reality, which unbalance the typifying relationship between character and social environment. The fact is that with the crash of established creeds, the progress of science, and the growth of political indifferentism, the ideology of realism, portraying man as typical of his socio-historical context, has become impossible. In Flaubert and Turgenev a preoccupation with original subjective states, and in Dostoevsky an interest in the subconscious, reduce the objective value of the external world and begin to free man from the social and ethical contingencies that in the past have defined him. The naturalistic fiction of Zola may be thought to participate in this general aesthetic trend towards the subjectivisation or attenuation of external reality. The only reality it creates is one that must be conceived as nature itself, to which the human characters are related organically by their physical passions and desires. In Zola's work these characters have lost the kind of density that marked their realist counterparts; they lack typicality.

Lukács, the patron saint and inflexible vindicator of realism,

looks askance at the coming of naturalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. For he sees in it, good Marxist that he is, evidence of a positive decline of the artist's emphasis on the social and historical factors that are supposed to determine communal human life and inform characters. According to Lukács, the culpable agent in the shift away from realism is the new concern for what he calls "mere biological process" (what I would call the process of nature):

> Any description of mere biological process results in a levelling-down of the social, historical, and moral being of man and is not a means but an obstacle to such essential artistic expression as illuminating human conflicts in all their complexity and completeness. It is for this reason that the new contents and new media of expression contributed by naturalism have led not to an enrichment but to an impoverishment and narrowing-down of literature. . . . For the inner life of man, its essential traits and essential conflicts, can be truly portrayed only in organic connection with social and historical factors.[24]

While I cannot agree that naturalism tends to impoverish literature, I do acknowledge that Lukács is at least right in his perception of a "levelling-down" of man's social being in naturalism.[25] Zola offers impressive proof of it. Despite Zola's frequently stated admiration for Balzac, nowhere in his fiction does he endow society or history with the status of objective force. The social milieu, insofar as it exists at all in the naturalist's world, consists of the immediate human environment, the family, or the community of a street, town, or district, which has nothing of the specific moral and historical significance characteristic of realist depiction. This assertion should acquire more authority with the support of the illustrations brought to bear in the next chapters. For the present

argument, we must believe that the central deterministic power shaping the naturalistic universe is not the external force of traditional, institutional society, but rather the internal forces of natural human passion, constant, primitive, and irreducible.

The foregoing observations, helped by the invocation of Lukács, on the realism of Balzac and the naturalism of Zola should serve to call in question the putative continuity of the two concepts. The distinction is worth making and underlining because too many people have assumed that realism and naturalism are species of the same genus. Not long ago, for example, a pair of critics, Furst and Skrine, enunciated the all-too-common opinion that naturalism develops realism into a formal doctrine, somehow fulfils it logically. They defined this doctrine as a "very specific view of man":

> It was not just a matter of choosing more shocking subjects, earthier vocabulary, more striking slogans or more photographic details. The true difference lies much deeper: at its core is the imposition of a certain, very specific view of man on Realism's attitude of detached neutrality. Thus the naturalists not only elaborated and intensified the basic tendencies of Realism; they also added important new elements which turned Naturalism into a recognizable doctrine such as Realism had never been.[26]

It is difficult to see how the later movement could consolidate the tendencies of the former if something so finally significant as its view of man was the major point of difference. Furthermore, the generalisation, like a good many in the field of naturalism, is unsupported by examples. As I hope to show, the examples make all the difference. We must not, of course, underestimate, or worse, deny altogether, the influence in France that realism

exerted on naturalism, which was evidently strong: we know that Stendhal and Balzac affected Zola and his group with the force of inspiration. But for the sake of defining naturalism's independent tradition the distinction has to be made.

Notes to Chapter Three

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5. Aristotle, The Art of Poetry, trans. Richard McKeon (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1947), p. 706.

6. See, for example, Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: Viking, 1957), pp. 87-8.

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8. Marie Henri Beyle, Correspondance (Paris: Le Divan, 1933), II, 90.

9. T.S. Eliot, "In Memory of Henry James," The Egoist, 2 (1918); quoted in J. Hillis Miller, Poets of Reality (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press 1965), p. 137.

10. George Eliot, Middlemarch (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950), p. 58.

11. Watt, op. cit., p. 27.

12. Boris Suchov, A History of Realism (Moscow: Progress, 1973), p.79.

13. Alfred de Musset, La Confession d'un enfant du siècle (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p. 7.

14. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), p. 463.

15. See René Wellek, "The Concept of Realism in Modern Scholarship," Neophilologus, 45 (1961), 11.

16. E.P. Dargan and W.P. Crain, "The First Monument: Les Chouans,"

in Studies in Balzac's Realism, ed. E.P. Dargan (New York: Russell & Russell, 1932), pp. 60-61.

17. Georg Lukács, Studies in European Realism, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), p. 6.

18. Ibid., p. 83.

19. See Hippolyte Taine, Nouveaux Essais de critique et d'histoire, 8 éd. (Paris: Hachette, 1905). pp. 31-48.

20. Honoré de Balzac, La Comédie humaine, ed. Marcel Bouteron (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952), III, 483.

21. Ibid., III, 491.

22. Ibid., VI, 705.

23. Henry James, French Poets and Novelists (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 89.

24. Lukács, op. cit., pp. 7, 8.

25. For a good refutation of Lukacs' general argument about Zola, see J. Pelletier "Lukács, lecteur de Zola," Les Cahiers Naturalistes No. 41 (1971), pp. 58-74.

26. Lilian Furst and Peter N. Skrine, Naturalism, The Critical Idiom, 18 (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 8.

CHAPTER FOUR

Zola and French Naturalism

Although, as I have been at pains to make clear, the roots of naturalism were established well before Zola's time, there does exist something called "French naturalism." This movement, comprehending a cluster of writers, and whose formal premises are so carefully explored and variously defined by literary scholars, must seem to be beyond the interests of the present study which strives to describe a long tradition of naturalism in literature. The members of the "groupe de Médan" and the arguments of "Le Roman expérimental" cannot have much to do with the naturalistic ideas that I have drawn out in the previous three chapters. Indeed, they do not; yet it is very important to our purpose to distinguish the theory of French naturalism from its practice, particularly Zola's theory from his practice, because the two are quite different things. Zola after all, is the greatest naturalist, and we should be aware of the way in which he attained such success in spite of his theory, the way in which he must be conceived independently of his contemporaries and immediate antecedents even as he influenced and was influenced by them. Only then can we rescue him from the confines of "French naturalism" and place him in our developing context.

This chapter, therefore, deals primarily with the theories, ideas, and artists that constitute the context in which Zola is usually seen;

the next, concentrating on Zola's fictional practice, promises considerable evidence of a naturalism that transcends such a milieu. In the following discussion there may arise some problem over the term "naturalism" or "naturalistic," since my broader definition is sharing the chapter with the narrower doctrinal definition. I trust, however, that a very general distinction is already fairly clear and that the reader will be able to discriminate between the two senses.

Let us begin these reflections on naturalistic theory in France with an instructive example of Zola's own capacity to see the perils of doctrine--perils which, significantly, he could only dramatise in his fiction, not in his theoretical writings. At one moment near the beginning of L'Oeuvre the novelist Sandoz, said to be a representation of Zola himself, remonstrates with his painter friend Claude Lantier about the new order of literature of which he will be the prophet: "Bien sûr, c'est à la science que doivent s'adresser les romanciers et les poètes, elle est aujourd'hui l'unique source possible" (V, 466). Claude agrees that a liberation of art from the fetters of the past and a commitment to "truth" are an urgent necessity of the present: "tout voir et tout peindre!" he exclaims, adding that contemporary artists should purge their cloying romanticism, a residue of the age of Balzac and Hugo: "Ah! nous y trempons tous, dans la sauce romantique. Notre jeunesse y a trop barboté, nous en sommes barbouillés jusqu'au menton. Il nous faudra une fameuse lessive" (V, 467).[1] In Sandoz' view a new era of scientific

optimism would wash away the puerile fantasies of the previous artistic generation and lay bare reality as it ought to be seen.

But towards the end of the story, after Claude has hanged himself in the misery of his unfulfilled life, the novelist has lost confidence in the kind of science that promises such liberation, such absolute certainty, and is wholly bereft of his early idealism: "on a trop promis, on a trop espéré, on a attendu la conquête et l'explication de tout; et l'impatience gronde. Comment! on ne marche pas plus vite? la science ne nous a pas encore donné, en cent ans, la certitude absolue, le bonheur parfait? A quoi bon continuer, puisqu'on ne saura jamais tout et que notre pain restera aussi amer? . . . Ah! certes! je n'affirme rien, je suis moi-même déchiré" (V, 733). This sombre theme should be familiar to any student of Zola, since it surfaces elsewhere, in Au bonheur des dames (IV, 758-9) and La Joie de vivre (IV, 1214) for instance. It is a characteristically naturalistic pessimism. In L'Oeuvre, however, the pessimism that Sandoz voices may be an index of the descent from hopeful theory to actual confrontation with reality, and is thus evidence of Zola's awareness that abstract doctrine cannot always be carried over into life or art.

Of course, for Zola, as for Sandoz, abstract doctrine must have scientific authority. And despite regular assaults of doubt, realised in his fiction, he was ever ready to affirm his belief in science and what it could do for the progress of humanity. In particular, he

thought that it might serve to fortify reason against the onslaught of religion and mysticism. As late at 1896, in his worknotes for Paris, Zola proclaimed anew his conviction that science would conquer: "La science est la toute puissance, et c'est la foi qui chancelle devant elle."[2] Yet I insist that it is not a good idea to trust implicitly any of Zola's theoretical pronouncements as a basis for understanding his fiction, its form or content. The above example from L'Oeuvre, the passage from high idealism to torpid disillusionment, shows the extent to which the author in his theme is prepared to set aside his "doctrine," his beliefs, in order, quite simply, to make a good novel. Similarly, in the matter of technique, when he speaks of the scientific transcription of observed reality, we must not take him at his word (as some critics seem to have done) and measure the practice of his fiction against his principle. It should be borne in mind that, although the theorist Zola was very much responsive to the intellectual currents of his time, excited by the ideas of Comte, Taine, Bernard, and others, such currents did not invariably establish roots in his fiction. We all know about the rather flimsy theory of heredity on which Les Rougon-Macquart was ostensibly founded; but in practice there was nothing in it that undermined the aesthetic integrity of the series or of any single work (though assuredly it played havoc with Madeleine Férat).

What were these intellectual currents that so informed Zola's theoretical assumptions about literature and life? Undoubtedly, the most important general influence on him was positivism, associated with

the philosophy of Comte. It is impossible to underestimate the effect of Comte on the French nineteenth century, for his doctrines contributed to every lycéen's intellectual formation, including that of Zola, a man with infinite respect for science. Comte dreamt of synthesising science and religion, extending the application of science to every object of creation, and establishing the supremacy of scientific method in every human pursuit. Among thinkers of that epoch in French intellectual history a belief in the methods of experimental science, scientism as it came to be called, was a veritable fashion: in a period of great ideas and generous sentiments, Michelet and Renan wanted to give the study of history the impression of a noble discipline with the dignity of science; Sainte-Beuve and Brunetière could see ways of applying scientific principles to literary theory and criticism; laws of evolution were being found for nearly everything. It was this thoroughly positivistic atmosphere that allowed Zola, a student of genealogy, to subtitle his great work, Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire.

But surely the most immediate positivistic influence on Zola and his circle was Hippolyte Taine. In Taine's robustly materialistic and deterministic view, every phenomenon has its cause which may be reduced to a set of constant physical or moral data. There are even identifiable causes for psychological or moral qualities: according to Pierre Martino's felicitous expression, for Taine "la psychologie n'était qu'un chapitre de la physiologie."[3] The locus classicus

of this simplistic faith in the interfusion of the physical and the moral occurs in Taine's most important production, his Histoire de la littérature anglaise, published in 1865: "Que les faits soient physiques ou moraux, il n'importe, ils ont toujours des causes; il y en a pour l'ambition, pour le courage, pour la véracité, comme pour la digestion, pour le mouvement musculaire, pour la chaleur animale. Le vice et la vertu sont des produits comme le vitriol et le sucre, et toute donnée complexe naît par la rencontre d'autres données plus simples dont elle depend."[4] Furthermore, he goes on to contend that there are three different sources that contribute to produce the elementary moral state in man: race, milieu, and moment.[5] And as a product of these three conditions, art is essentially no different from any other human pursuit:

> Il en est ainsi pour chaque espèce de production humaine, pour la littérature, la musique, les arts du dessin, la philosophie, les sciences, l'Etat, l'industrie, et le reste. Chacune d'elles a pour cause directe une disposition morale, ou un concours de dispositions morales; cette cause donnée, elle apparaît; cette cause retirée, elle disparait; la faiblesse ou l'intensité de cette cause mesure sa propre intensité ou sa propre faiblesse. . . . Il y a ici des couples dans le monde moral, comme il y en a dans le monde physique, aussi rigoureusement enchaînés et aussi universellement répandus dans l'un que dans l'autre.[6]

Contemplating the scheme of his own oeuvre, the young Zola could not have failed to be impressed by this neatly integrated vision of the order of things in the world. For he sought such a vision himself, a unitary system of principles, strictly empirical in character, that would inform alike the events, personalities, and themes of his fiction.

Another crucial reference in the growth of Zola's theory in his early years was the ideas of Dr. Claude Bernard. Although Zola did not come to know about Bernard's Introduction à la médecine expérimentale (1865) until well after he had begun the Rougon-Macquart series (Henri Céard, apparently, had put the book in his hands), he found in it a suggestion of how he might go about explaining his own conception of the novel, a conception which he then elaborated in the essay "Le Roman expérimental." Bernard was committed to articulate the methods that chemists and biologists take for granted in their laboratories, approaching the phenomena with a view to dividing them into constants and variables, trying to establish a paradigm on which to develop a theory. To express what was already known and long accepted may seem to us a rather redundant effort; however, we must remember that at the time of the publication of the Introduction many physicians conceived of their profession as more of an art, a matter of feeling and intuition, than an exact science. It was Bernard who insisted on situating medicine in a fully scientific context, founded on physiology and among contiguous sciences like chemistry and physics.

What excited Zola about Bernard's argument was its possible implications for the novel. Hitherto, reasoned Zola, the novel had been considered exclusively an art, an exercise of imagination; but now he felt that the time had come to emancipate the novel for the demands of the age of positive science. The experimental novel would in effect become a scientific procedure, founded on psychology,

or physiology rather (since, as Taine and Zola would encourage us to believe, the two subjects are the same thing under different names. The propsects for validating such an extension of positivism into the domain of literature are stated unequivocally close to the beginning of "Le Roman expérimental":

> Je vais tâcher de prouver à mon tour que, si la méthode expérimentale conduit à la connaissance de la vie physique, elle doit conduire aussi à la connaissance de la vie passionnelle et intellectuelle. Ce n'est là qu'une question de degrés dans la même voie, de la chimie à la physiologie, puis de la physiologie à l'anthropologie et à la sociologie. Le roman expérimental est au bout (X, 1175).

The presence of Taine and Bernard here is clearly discernible.

The essay from which that passage is extracted is Zola's most significant theoretical manifesto, but it is also his most speculative work, an enquiry into the possibility of an experimental novel: he nowhere identifies himself as a model of the experimental novelist, though obviously he can imagine himself fulfilling the rôle.[7] Like a good scientist, this hypothetical experimenter, the naturalistic novelist, is an observer too, a collector of data: "L'observateur chez lui donne les faits tels qu'il les a observé, pose le point de départ, établit le terrain solide sur lequel vont marcher les personnages et se développer les phénomènes. Puis l'expérimentateur paraît et institue l'expérience, je veux dire fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l'exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude" (X, 1178). Zola goes on to cite Balzac's La Cousine Bette as an example of the sort of experimentation that

the naturalistic novel should undertake (X, 1178-9); it demonstrates, by developing a series of tests on the basis of observed facts, the function of human passion and the destruction it causes in the hero, Baron Hulot, in his family, and in society. As this illustration implies, the naturalist's duty is not only to study the physio-chemical life of the individual, but also to expose the modificatory power of the environment, the reciprocal effects of individual on society and society on individual. Zola recognises the importance of such a relation between the individual and social mechanisms when he writes: "dans l'étude d'une famille, d'un groupe d'êtres vivants, je crois que le milieu social a également une importance capitale. . . . L'homme n'est pas seul, il vit dans une société, dans un milieu social, et dès lors pour nous, romanciers, ce milieu social modifie sans cesse les phénomènes. Même notre grande étude est là, dans le travail réciproque de la société sur l'individu et de l'individu sur la société" (X, 1184). Thus the naturalist extends his rôle beyond that of laboratory experimenter and observer to that of social commentator, without wishing to propagandise or preach, and trusting that a dispassionate presentation of a given situation may result in some form of social action. Seeking to grasp the mechanism of passion in society, he hopes thereby to be able to treat and finally dominate it: "Et voilà où se trouve l'utilité pratique et la haute morale de nos oeuvres naturalistes, qui expérimentent sur l'homme, qui démontent et remontent pièce à pièce la machine humaine, pour la faire fonctionner sous l'influence des milieux" (X, 1188).

Now evidently the theory of the application of the methods of natural science to literature has its limitations. One pivotal objection is that the novelist, unlike the scientist, creates his own phenomena--characters, environment, plot--and he does not make use of something that existed before he entered his "laboratory." In an early statement of this radical weakness in Zola's naturalistic theory, Brunetière seizes on and ridicules the notion of an "idée expérimentale" (X, 1181), which, he claims, should refer to something that may be concluded from the experiment and is not itself a basis for discovery: "Si ces deux mots associés veulent dire quelque chose, ils ne peuvent signifier qu'une idée induite, conclue, tirée de l'expérience, quelque chose de postérieur à l'expérience, non pas d'antérieur, une acquisition faite et non pas une conquête à faire." The experimental novelist can only experiment with his own vision, ". . . car le romancier comme le poète, si'il expérimente, ne peut expérimenter que sur soi, nullement sur les autres."[8]

It is certainly interesting that Zola should define naturalism as a method, distinct from a literary form or style, for, when French naturalism went abroad, it was the method that made perhaps the strongest impression--the constructional technique, scientific exactitude, and sheer documentary engineering. The German Michael Georg Conrad, writing in 1880, thought he could see the realisation of such qualities in Zola himself: "Seine Technik errinert gewissermassen an die des Bauermeisters, des Ingenieurs, an die seines seligen Vaters. Er erforscht und prüft sein Terrain, sein Material bis ins einzelnste und operiert

mit Zahl, Mass und Gewicht--kurz er baut nicht ins Blaue hinein."[9] But is this true of Zola's fiction? It is clear to me, by its vocabulary, that Conrad's description responds more to the novelist's stated theory, his propaganda, than to his practice. A novel by Zola shows as much engineering, no doubt, as a novel by Balzac, and assuredly less than one by Flaubert; and he could create "ins Blaue."

Zola's failure to consider thoroughly the problem of form also alerts us to another weakness in the theory, one that Zola's own practice will bear witness to. French naturalism, though otherwise a fairly strict credo, demands no special form or mode of expression. It may even be assimilated to the theatre, so long as the experimental purpose remains intact: "Il s'agira simplement de changer la facture, la carcasse de l'oeuvre," writes Zola in "Le Naturalisme au théâtre" (X, 1254). And did not the master himself repeat to his followers that he was not particularly concerned about <u>how</u> they represented the truth, on condition that they should not shrink from it?[10] Zola feels he can say these things because he conceives of method as logically entailing form; there is no disjunction between them. The experimental method, he argues, establishes the form by itself and ought not to require any conscious attempt at embellishment. Language and style should seem to be natural and scientific: "Nous sommes actuellement pourris de lyrisme, nous croyons bien à tort que le grand style est fait d'un effarement sublime, toujours près de culbuter dans la démence; le grand style est fait de logique et de clarté" (X, 1200). These words invite comparison with Zola's

fictional practice, where we remark a frequent and barely restrained tendency towards lyrical passionateness and stylistic pyrotechnics. A random examination of some of the luxuriant physical descriptions in La Curée or La Faute de l'abbé Mouret, for instance, will show just how far the novelist falls short of his ideal style. Referring to the latter work, Taine reproves Zola for not imposing on himself a formal discipline: "Vous êtes sur le cheval de Mazeppa. Parfois c'est dangereux et vertigineux; les images, bien mieux, les sensations physiques (notamment celles de l'odeur) vous causent une sorte d'ivresse. Il faut toujours rester maître de soi."[11] Zola's interest in and willingness to be intoxicated by such things as "sensations physiques" are, of course, quite consonant with traditional naturalism, and, whether he knew it or not, constitute a strenuous resistance to scientific method.

But, as I intimated earlier, we need not devote much energy to serious criticism of Zola's doctrinaire views as expressed in "Le Roman experimental" and elsewhere, though we are definitely obliged to know them. (If there is a chemically pure realisation of doctrinal naturalism it must be Une belle journée by Henri Céard, an exceptionally dull example of slice-of-life fiction.) Fortunately, Zola never allowed himself to be bound by these views. Only two years after "Le Roman expérimental," for instance, in an essay called "Le Naturalisme" (XIV, 507-11), he demonstrates his capacity to see beyond naturalism as method: he treats the doctrine as a historical movement to be counted among the other two great concepts that have

shaped French literature, classicism and romanticism. Acknowledging, therefore, Zola's theoretical flexibility or inconsistency, quite apart from his sheer ingenuousness, we may accept the general irrelevance of what Croce terms the "biografia empirica" of the author. Theory and practice are distinct.

To underscore this truth I think it would be worth quoting, in extenso, the judgement of René Dumesnil, who, aware of the central fallacy of scientism in literature, summarises very well the correct sense in which we must value Zola's fiction:

> Ce qui demeure dans ces romans, c'est ce qui est dehors des théories et des systèmes, c'est un portrait, c'est un paysage, c'est précisément ce qui n'a pas de caractère demonstratif, ce qui ne veut point étayer une théorie pseudo-scientifique, et que la science elle-même, dans sa marche, en s'appuyant sur de nouvelles hypothèses, va rendre caduc. Le défaut du scientisme, et qui le condamne, c'est d'avoir tenu pour démonstration ce qui n'était qu'hypothèse, ou d'avoir cru que les hypothèses qu'il formulait étaient de caractère scientifique alors qu'elles n'en avaient que l'apparence.[12]

So much for the intellectual context of French naturalistic theory, from which Zola has to be removed. However, there is yet another contemporary context that merits our consideration. I refer to the literary milieu of Paris during and just before Zola's time, the influences, ideas, and artistic transactions surrounding the development of French naturalism in the second half of the century. This concern, admittedly, has no direct relation to the question of formal doctrine, but it does have a bearing on the contemporary theory of the novel, the particular direction the novel was taking at the hands

of writers like Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Huysmans. We should examine the background that such artists furnish, the periphery of French naturalism, and think of the sense in which the novelist Zola is not part of it.

In the 1850s and 60s there were two discernible groups in French artistic life, the circle that formed around the Goncourt brothers, with Flaubert a little distant but on good terms with them, and the cénacle réaliste dominated by Champfleury, Duranty, and Courbet. The relations between the groups were never exactly amicable. Arriving on the scene later, Zola, it seems, was not much troubled by this antagonism and imbibed influences from both groups. But as time passed it became evident that Zola owed more to Flaubert and the Goncourts than to the self-styled réalistes. Champfleury, for example, could recognise nothing of his realist doctrine in Nana.[13]

Some of the characteristics of Flaubert that impressed Zola were the older writer's exquisite precision in language, his minute attention to detail, his painstaking analysis of the merest gesture or feeling, his impassibilité and scrupulous detachment from the experience he describes. These formal qualities have a scientific ring to them, though it must be remembered that Flaubert was thoroughly independent of the fashionable positivism of his age.[14] And indeed Flaubert would not have discouraged the comparison between his aesthetic practice and the methods of science. At about the same time as the appearance of Bernard's Introduction he could write: "Je rêve d'un style qui serait

rhythmé comme le vers et précis comme le langage des sciences."[15] In a sense, perhaps, Flaubert's important innovation in novelistic technique, the use of free indirect discourse, is consistent with the shifts of consciousness brought about by science, among other things. (Actually, this device may be proven to go back at least to La Fontaine, but Madame Bovary is the first literary work where it becomes the central narrative mode.) Blending a character's subjective impressions of the external world with the narrator's interpretation of them, free indirect discourse abolishes the worldly-wise, Balzacian narrator and identifies a new narrator, less "visible" and less personally entailed in the narrative.[16] Such a process of objectification, as it were, may be thought to give the writing of fiction the kind of clinical dispassionateness that the French naturalists were--theoretically--seeking.

A decisive difference between Flaubert and Zola, however, is that while the former would content himself with a mere comparison of his stylistic methods with the procedures of science, the latter often seems to want to be conceived as a sort of experimental scientist, investing his fiction with laboratorial dignity. In fact, on this level of theory, Flaubert is a much more complex literary figure than Zola, for he may be seen to contain within his capacious genius elements of the symbolist and the decadent as well as of the naturalist. The creator of Saint-Antoine and Hérodias exercised as important an influence on symbolism and decadentism as the creator of Madame Bovary on French naturalism. There are two

definable Flauberts, the one given to "eagle flights" and impassioned lyricism, the other, the "scientist," digging for facts and wishing to present with equal precision and detail the greatest and the smallest of the things he describes. We cannot believe that Flaubert ever discovered an entirely satisfying resolution to his radical dualism, his fascination with the ideal and the real, but he did seek one in art--an art which dominates turbid violence by purity of form. Formal perfection, therefore, is the sole truth: "Comme vous le dites souvent," wrote Zola to this teacher in 1879 "il n'y a de vrai dans ce monde qu'une phrase bien faite" (XIV, 1403).

Flaubert's aesthetic practice, from his stylistic precision to his capacity to forge symbolic milieux, exerted a profound influence on Zola: the symbolist influenced the naturalist, we might say.[17] It occurs to me, however, that Flaubert's own naturalistic strain expresses itself most obviously in a lesser known work, Salammbô, which bears fewer signs of formal restraint than other works like Madame Bovary and L'Education sentimentale. The novel is naturalistic insofar as it explores a fictional domain where the rational forces of what we call culture or civilisation have a relatively small presence: it is a passionate and violent tale of ancient Carthage, a sombre pageant of bloody victories and defeats, of dynamic energy and physical inaction, reeking of the fetid odours of battle and the pungent perfumes of temple or palace. The central psychological interest of the novel lies in the hero Mathô's infatuation with the princess Salammbô, a love at once divine and

sexual. The voluptuous descriptions of pagan luxury correspond to the almost constantly threatening sexuality of the chief characters, and in that respect they seem to anticipate Zola's style in his novels of erotic power: I have already mentioned La Curée and La Faute de l'abbé Mouret as examples of such unrestrained sensual lyricism.

Yet despite this instance of naturalistic tendencies in theme, and despite his inspirational influence on Zola and his followers, Flaubert was no thoroughgoing naturalist--at least not in the sense that I am defining the term. In short, he presents himself as too much of an aesthete, too intent on refining natural passions and instincts through the medium of Art. Zola, for all his studiously ordered documentation and magisterial command over method, had neither the patience nor the commitment to create "une nef ouvragée avec des finesses de ciseau merveilleuses" (X, 916); he could never stuff his infinite dreams and desires into the head of the daughter of a well-to-do peasant. Similarly, the other naturalistic writers who have figured in this study, artists like Tieck and Hoffmann, Poe and Hawthorne, could not attain the heights of Flaubert's aristocratic distance from nature because they were earth-bound, so to speak: their symbol-making serves to express an awareness of the fatality of flesh or man's primordial relation to physical nature. By distinguishing thus between the allegiances of Flaubert and the naturalists I want to point out an essential proposition: that for naturalism, the aesthetic is not primary among the categories of

experience. It is in the light of this proposition, it seems to me, that we should view the Goncourts and Huysmans. True enough, these writers, like Flaubert, are always associated in literary history with the growth of the French naturalistic programme; but they do belong to the tradition of the style artiste. Their aestheticism is stronger than any kind of naturalism.

On the surface, the fiction of Jules and Edmond de Goncourt bears no slight resemblance to that of Zola--an underlying pessimism, a preoccupation with psychological and physiological causality, meticulous observation of detail, an unwillingness to withdraw from the truth, and so forth. If we look at their most famous work, Germinie Lacerteux (1864), we can see the evidence of such a resemblance. In their preface to that novel the Goncourts proclaimed that they were writing faithfully about the common people, "les basses classes." Their statement, coming two years after Les Misérables, must strike us as a little ostentatious, yet the brothers were introducing new themes: they were not interested in situating the lives of their proletarian characters in the vast conflict of good and evil, which was Hugo's purpose. Germinie Lacerteux is presented as a thoroughly objective account of the fortunes of an ordinary housemaid who falls in love with a wastrel and proceeds from lust and deception to alcoholism and death. What above all characterises Germinie, as her creators want us to believe, is a certain lymphatic temperament that puts her at the mercy of her instincts and so enfeebles her capacity for free will. Physiology

determines character. This audacious theme of physical degeneration in a lower-class milieu had a profound effect on the young Zola, and we must concede that without the model of Germinie Lacerteux Zola probably could not have written L'Assommoir.[18]

Although they could conceive of their novel as a "clinique de l'amour," an "enquête sociale," and a "recherche physiologique,"[19] the Goncourts yet give the impression that their preoccupation with the milieu of the lower classes has a good deal to do with intense aesthetic curiosity. According to Auerbach, whose judgement we may respect here, the brothers "were collectors and depicters of sensory impressions valuable for their strangeness or novelty. They were professional discoverers or rediscoverers of aesthetic, and particularly morbidly aesthetic, experiences suited to satisfy an exacting taste surfeited with the usual. It was from this point of view that the common people appealed to them as a literary subject."[20] One memorable example of this kind of morbid aestheticism in Germinie Lacerteux occurs when the heroine and her faithless lover are shown to be walking along an endless street at night under bleak winter skies: "L'air humide et chargé qu'ils respiraient sentait le sucre, le suif et la charogne. Par moments, il leur passait comme un flamboiement devant les yeux: c'était une tapissière dont la lanterne donnait sur des bestiaux eventrés et des carrés de viande sanglante jetés sur la croupe d'un cheval blanc. . . ."[21] A premonition of approaching oblivion and ugly death, which are Germinie's certain destiny, these words also express the authors' attraction to

sensory detail, however unwholesome. Zola, of course, with an altogether different consciousness, was not above emulating such baleful descriptions.

That the Goncourts' principal concern as novelists and intellectuals was far more aesthetic than political, social, moral, or scientific, is considerably supported by evidence in their Journal, itself a work of art. Edmond, for instance, in his entry of December 3, 1871 (Jules had died the year before), responds directly to the question of his interest in the lower social orders: "Mais pourquoi . . . choisir ces milieux? . . . Peut-être parce que je suis un litterateur bien né, et que le peuple, la canaille, si vous voulez, a pour moi l'attrait de populations inconnues, et non découvertes, quelque chose de l'exotique que les voyageurs vont chercher avec mille souffrances dans les pays lointains."[22] But the clearest avowal of their sense of aristocratic distance from common reality, and for our purposes the most relevant, appears in an earlier entry (December 14, 1862) which both the brothers composed: "Il nous semble, quand nous tâtons à fond, être des émigrés du XVIIIe siècle. Nous sommes des contemporains déclassés de cette société raffinée, exquise de délicatesse suprême, d'esprit enragé, de corruption adorable, la plus intelligente, la plus policée, la plus fleurie de belles façons, d'art, de volupté, de fantaisie, de caprice, la plus humaine, c'est-à-dire la plus eloignée de la nature, que le monde ait jamais ene" (my emphasis).[23] A society farthest from the state of nature--that, then, is their ideal. We are compelled to contrast the Goncourts' antagonism to the natural with the true

naturalist's insistence on it; more specifically, we might contrast the brothers' distaste for contemporary reality and their aesthetic attachment to the eighteenth century with Zola's vision of the Second Empire, a society immersed in the chaos of nature.

During the actual period of naturalism's emergence as a "school" presided over by Zola, the name of J.-K. Huysmans suggests itself as a further illustration of a tendency towards the aesthetic antagonism to physical nature. The work on which his celebrity rests is A rebours (1884), which may be said to conform to the Goncourts' notion of style artiste, and which, significantly, has been translated into English under the title Against Nature. Nevertheless, Huysmans was from the mid seventies to the early eighties a loyal naturalist of the Médan doctrine: he contributed the tale "Sac-au-dos" to Les Soirées de Médan, and published a succession of novels, like Marthe and A Vau l'eau, written in the conventional manner of grand tawdriness. But eventually he discovered that the narrow prescriptivism of Zola's theory, the contemporary "naturalistic" preoccupation with scientific attitude and wearisomely recurrent themes and motifs, would not contain his rebellious imagination. A rebours marks the change, a change in his case towards decadentism. Style becomes everything, and by acknowledging the ultimate value of it Huysmans thus departs from the Zola circle. As he says through the mask of his hero in A rebours, "l'artifice paraissait à des Esseintes la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme. . . . Comme il le disait, la nature a fait son temps."[24] Nature, and naturalism, have had their day!

We know that Huysmans' transition, his retreat from nature, was by no means sudden and unprepared. For there exists in his early fiction an unmistakable tension, a Flaubertian sense of terrible contradiction, between impulses towards the real and the fanciful, the common and the exquisite, the natural and the aesthetic. Zola must surely have seen this contradiction when in 1881 he defended Huysmans from the accusation of coarseness and vulgarity, stressing that he was, on the contrary, more guilty of the other extreme, of too much refinement and preciosity: "Rien de lourd, de commun; au contraire, son défaut est le rare, l'exquis, l'exceptionnel. Il raffine trop, il tourmente et travaille trop ses phrases comme des bijoux" (XIV, 582). Within a few years Huysmans had emerged from this dualism and recognised the strength of his aesthetic tendencies which were always present. In 1891, passing from decadentism to mystical Catholicism, he felt he could at last define his rejection of his youthful literary allegiance. Here he uses the voice of des Hermies, a central character in Là-Bas:

> ". . . ce que je reproche au naturalisme, ce n'est pas le lourd badigeon de son gros style, c'est l'immondice de ses idées; ce que je lui reproche, c'est d'avoir incarné le matérialisme dans la littérature, d'avoir glorifier la démocratie de l'art!
>
> Oui, tu diras ce que tu voudras, mon bon, mais, tout de même, quelle théorie de cerveau mal famé, quel miteux et étroit système! Vouloir se confiner dans les buanderies de la chair, rejeter le supra-sensible, dénier le rêve, ne pas même comprendre que la curiosité de l'art commence là où les sens cessent de servir! . . ."[25]

These thoughts resume Huysmans' response to the system of French

naturalism, its incapacity to satisfy the demands of his own vision. But Zola, the maker of the system, was not confined by it either; for naturalism, in the broad sense of the term, is not systematic in theory or practice. Rejecting the suprasensible and the dream, refusing to ignore the senses in the name of art, the naturalist would deny the rarefied aestheticism and decadent heroism of Huysmans: who could imagine Zola availing himself of the perquisites of sainthood or withstanding the rigours of divinity? If we recognise that Zola was no aesthete, and thus in that respect distinct from his friends Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Huysmans; if we see the narrowness and impracticability of his theory--then we can save him from French naturalism. This task of conceiving him independently of some of the ideas and artists that are customarily associated with a naturalism fixed in time and place (late nineteenth century, France), has therefore been a necessary one. Although we cannot neglect the immense historical significance of the naturalistic movement in France, we should be prepared to view Zola and, later, his American descendents apart from it: they may be seen to belong to a context that transcends any evanescent literary movement.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. For Zola's own reflections on the influence of romanticism on the writers of his generation, see his essay "Les Romanciers contemporains," in Les Romanciers naturalistes, XI, 221-52.

2. Quoted by Henri Guillemin, Zola, légende ou vérité? (Paris: Julliard, 1960), p. 66. On the subject of Zola's scientific optimism, see, for example, David Baguley, "Fécondité" d'Emile Zola: roman à thèse, évangile, mythe (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 20-21.

3. Pierre Martino, Le Naturalisme français (Paris: A. Colin, 1923), p. 21.

4. Hippolyte Taine, Histoire de la littérature anglaise, 12 éd. (Paris: Hachette, 1905), p. xv.

5. Ibid., p. xxii.

6. Ibid., p. xxxviii.

7. The most intelligent and balanced assessment of this work that I have come across is Aime Guedj's preface to his edition of Le Roman experimental (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1971), pp. 17-44.

8. Ferdinand Brunetière, Le Roman naturaliste, nouv. éd. (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), pp. 107, 108.

9. Theo Meyer, ed., Theorie des Naturalismus (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975), p. 105.

10. F.W.J. Hemmings, Emile Zola, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 169.

11. Quoted by John C. Lapp, "Taine et Zola: autour d'une correspondance," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 87 (1957), p. 325.

12. René Dumesnil, Le Réalisme et le naturalisme (Paris: Del Duca de Giscord, 1955), pp. 176-7.

13. Emile Bouvier, La Bataille réaliste (Paris: Fontemoing, 1914), p. 347.

14. On the subject of the scientific attitude in literature before Zola, and particularly literary technique, an excellent recent reference is Aimé Guedj, "Le Naturalisme avant Zola: la littérature et la science sous le Second Empire," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 160 (1975), pp. 567-80.

15. Quoted by Dumesnil, op. cit., p. 175.

16. For a detailed study of the importance of free indirect discourse, see Dorrit Cohn, "Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style," Comparative Literature, 13 (1966), 97-112.

17. Witness, for example, Zola's paean to Flaubert in Les Romanciers naturalistes, XI, 97-120.

18. As Richard B. Grant suggests in The Goncourt Brothers (New York: Twayne, 1972), p. 72.

19. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, "Préface," Germinie Lacerteux, nouv. éd. (Paris: Charpentier, 1895), pp. vi, vii.

20. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1953) p. 498.

21. Goncourt, op. cit., p. 143.

22. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Journal: mémoires de la vie littéraire, ed. Robert Ricatte (Paris: Fasquelle-Flammarion, 1956), II, 848; quoted by Auerbach, op. cit., p. 498.

23. Ibid., I, 1193.

24. J.-K. Huysmans, A rebours, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: G. Crès, 1930), VII, 35.

25. Ibid., XII, 5-6.

CHAPTER FIVE

Naturalism in Zola's Fiction

The full thematic context in which the characters and events of Zola's fiction should be viewed is that of nature, a nature constant and powerful enough to enclose human society and make little of the noble ideals and ambitions of its denizens. It seems to me that this is without question the most important context for the study of Zola and that other contexts--social, political, scientific, aesthetic--though often useful in their limited way, are of a secondary order, merely touching the surface of his genius. Criticism of Zola's work has always recognised the presence of nature in its subject: it usually emphasises the author's capacity to "tell the truth" frankly and dispassionately, his obsession with base instincts and the sordid physical realities of life among the poor and depraved. Yet only in relatively recent years has Zola criticism given the theme of man and nature the serious attention it deserves. Among longer studies seeking to fulfil this critical need probably the most worthy of mention is Winston Hewitt's Through Those Living Pillars, which examines, particularly through imagery, the pattern of relations between man's emotions and natural phenomena in Zola's works up to 1893. Taking a more deliberately psychological approach, but no less interesting from our perspective, are Zola et les mythes by Jean Borie (especially his section headed "Les fatalités du corps dans Les Rougon-

Macquart"), a post-Freudian exploration of the beast in Zola's man, and L'Eros et la femme chez Zola by Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, who deals with the role of sexuality, its destructive and creative potential.[1] I cite these books because they are excellent precedents for my own attitude to the study of Zola, and they do invite a profounder definition of naturalism than the conventional one.

Despite the evidence marshalled in the previous chapter about the disparity between Zola's theory or intention and his fictional realisation, the novelist does, outside the novels and stories, occasionally vouchsafe a naturalistic point of view unobstructed by his doctrinaire opinions about the function of science. For example, in a letter of 1885 to Jules Lemaître, on the subject of the recently published Germinal, he situates man squarely within nature, not above or beyond it:

> J'accepte très volontiers votre définition: "Une épopée pessimiste de l'animalité humaine," à la condition pourtant de m'expliquer sur ce mot "animalité." Vous mettez l'homme dans le cerveau, je le mets dans tous ses organes. Vous isolez l'homme de la nature, je ne le vois pas sans la terre, d'où il sort et où il rentre. L'âme que vous enfermez dans un être, je la sens epandue partout, dans l'être et hors de l'être, dans l'animal dont il est le frère, dans la plante, dans le caillou. (XIV, 1439)

This is quite a lucidly expressed commitment to naturalism of the kind that figures forth in the artist's fiction, the idea that man and nature cannot be considered as separate entities. However, as we are aware, such unequivocally simple and uncompromising statements are not common among Zola's theoretical utterances,

even though they strike us as more consistent with his practice than his talk of the novel showing the mechanism of the phenomena which science has mastered.

The fact is that in general Zola places absolute faith in the benefits for man of disclosing the laws of nature and gaining mastery over them; yet, aside from Pascal, the presiding intellectual of Les Rougon-Macquart, he does not present us with much of a glimpse of this triumph--at least not in the early works and the series. Rather, he presents us with an almost uniformly hopeless spectacle of defeat, characters submitting to forces beyond their rational control. We can assume that these forces, forces of nature, are available to scientific enquiry, that there are discoverable laws which may help our understanding of why certain people behave the way they do. But the discussion of Zola's fiction cannot take place in the confines of mere cause-effect analysis. Looking again at Thérèse Raquin, for example, we cannot accept the psycho-physiological principles adumbrated in its preface as advice for our appreciation of what actually occurs in the book. Is this work simply about an organic disorder of the nervous system?

More than a tale of psycho-physiological deterioration, then, Thérèse Raquin may be an excellent introductory illustration of the kind of physical basis of Zola's fiction I am trying to define here.[2] It tells a story of sensuality leading to murder, remorse, and eventually suicide, and shows an illicit relationship between a

powerful man and an unsatisfied woman in the grip of passions which they seem unable to command. Laurent awakens the sleeping monster of Thérèse's female sexuality, made all the more vengeful by years of supression;[3] together they conspire to drown Thérèse's feckless husband, Camille, and after the murder they suffer their guilt like a demonic possession.

The narrator enforces the effect of tension and violence by frequent use, probably over-use, of such expressive words as "vautrer," "brutal," "nerfs," "sang," "frisson," "chair." But in the whole sensational vocabulary of the tale there is surely no word so heavily charged with significance as "remords." The murderer Laurent, though unassailed by conscience, is yet stricken with remorse, an entirely physical thing: "Ses remords étaient purement physiques. Son corps, ses nerfs irrités et sa chair tremblante avaient seuls peur du noyé. Sa conscience n'entrait pour rien dans ses terreurs" (I, 614). Shifting our perception from the metaphorical to the literal, we understand that "remords" are the bite, "morsure," which the drowning Camille inflicts on his killer. The irremovable tooth-mark on Laurent's neck becomes inflamed with his memory of the murdered man and is thus a physical symbol of guilt. This figuration of guilt as something that bites deeply into one recurs in Les Rougon-Macquart: for instance, in La Bête humaine Jacques Lantier feels himself overcome by "la bête prête à mordre" (VI, 212), the beast of his criminal passion; and later, possessed by the homicidal curse of the Macquarts, he suffers

"des morsures de feu" as he murders his beloved Séverine, "morsures" which "lui trouaient la tête, gagnaient ses bras, ses jambes, le chassaient de son propre corps, sous le galop d'un autre, la bête envahissante" (VI, 269). It is tempting here to invoke comparative references to the Gothic romance where guilt or remorse often has a physical manifestation. Hawthorne's scarlet letter, a sort of Gothic device, might be regarded as a stigmatic scar, but which, of course, unlike Laurent's, eventually liberates rather than imprisons its bearer.[4]

The Gothic horror of Thérèse Raquin is conveyed above all by the persistence of hallucination in the lives of the two lovers. After their marriage, when they finally get into bed together, they have the dreadful feeling that the corpse of Camille is actually lying between them, the ghastly, decomposed figure of the drowned man. This apparition precipitates a nervous crisis in Laurent, who accuses his wife of arousing the spectre: "Et dès que la nuit tombait, dès qu'il était enfermé avec sa femme, des sueurs glacées montaient à sa peau, des effrois d'enfant le secouaient. Il subissait ainsi des crises périodiques, des crises de nerfs qui revenaient tous les soirs, qui détraquaient ses sens, en lui montrant la face verte et ignoble de sa victime" (I, 614). We seem to be back in the hallucinatory world of Poe, where diseased mental states can produce phantasms of lurid physicality: Laurent is surely related to, or at least resembles, William Wilson, a man pursued by the terrifying spectre of his guilt, or Roderick Usher, who suffers from nervous crises and a morbid acuteness of the senses.

There is no doubt that Thérèse Raquin, despite its various excesses, anticipates in many ways the themes of Les Rougon-Macquart. The point needs emphasising lest it be thought that the early works only constitute a youthful phase from which their author would escape into more serious subject-matter. Such, after all, was the point of view of Taine, who wanted to see Zola turn into a new Balzac, a novelist of manners.[5] F.W.J. Hemmings quotes Taine's judgement uncritically and, though he is absolutely right in regarding Thérèse Raquin and Madeleine Férat as "fate tragedies" depicting a Gothic fatality of the flesh, he goes on to mention Zola's growing commitment to "sociological studies" and retreat from "domestic histories."[6] Now evidently a considerable development did occur in Zola's literary life after 1868, but we cannot believe that it was quite as radical as a change from the private dramas of high passion to the public studies of society. In his mature work, before Les Trois Villes, Zola did not altogether abjure the Gothicism of his earlier years, he did maintain his conception of character as a bundle of primitive emotions, and persisted in a basically physical vision of the universe and of the human society within it. This continuity of qualities allows us to get a purchase on the naturalism of Les Rougon-Macquart. My intention here is not to reject out of hand the conventionally perceived social dimension in Zola, but rather to throw into relief a profounder dimension, beyond society.

It is not difficult to understand the attractiveness of the opinion that Zola's interests in Les Rougon-Macquart are pre-eminently social. The series of twenty novels is very carefully organised to

comprehend a vast multiplicity of social situations all conceived within the specific historical boundaries of the Second Empire. For example, La Fortune des Rougon tells of the republican revolution of 1851 and its effects on a regional town; La Curée, moral decadence in the Parisian society of the Empire; Le Ventre de Paris, the feeding of an enormous city and the life of the markets; La Faute de l'abbé Mouret, Catholicism and the perils of religious commitment; L'Assommoir, the power of alcohol among the lower classes; Nana, prostitution; Germinal, coal mining and the misery of the men and women who live by it; L'Oeuvre, the tortures of an artist's life; La Bête humaine, the great railway; L'Argent, the world of finance and the stock exchange; La Débâcle, the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of the Empire. With these systematic concerns in mind, Zola wanted to explore the lives of citizens at every level of society, from the poorest agricultural or urban labourer to members of the ruling class living in patrician comfort. He set about realising this idea by following two branches of a single family, the one legitimate and blessed with social position, inherited property, and education, and the other illegitimate, condemned to the lower class and oppressed by poverty.

Both lines of the family, however, rich and poor alike, are revealed to be morally unregenerate. According to Zola's own words in his general preface to Les Rougon-Macquart, such a decayed condition among the Rougons and the Macquarts is of genetic origin and springs from a "première lésion organique" which manifests itself

in response to stimuli in the particular milieu:

> Les Rougon-Macquart, le groupe, la famille, que je me propose d'étudier, a pour caractéristique le débordement des appétits, le large soulèvement de notre âge, qui se rue aux jouissances. Physiologiquement, ils sont la lente succession des accidents nerveux et sanguins qui se déclarent dans une race, à la suite d'une première lésion organique, et qui déterminent, selon les milieux, chez chacun des individus de cette race, les sentiments, les désirs, les passions, toutes les manifestations humaines, naturelles et instinctives, dont les produits prennent les noms convenus de vertus et de vices. (II, 19)

This, of course, is Zola's "doctrine." It makes its appearance from time to time throughout the series, but nowhere more strikingly than in the character of Adélaïde Fouque, first of the family, a morbidly emotional woman subject to frequent nervous seizures followed by catalepsy. After the death of her husband Rougon, a simple-minded market-gardener, she takes as her lover the smuggler Macquart, the alcoholic, who Zola seems to think is hereditarily responsible for the alcoholism in his descendants, just as Adélaide is responsible for the promiscuousness in hers.

Thus, when we consider the strength of the physiological determinism in Les Rougon-Macquart, the carefully ordered social interests lose much of their importance.[7] Society--real, objective society--is weaker than personal instincts, desires, and passions. Assuredly, we have good reason to be suspicious of a word like "physiological" with its reference to a dubious theory of heredity; "physical" would be a better word since it is more expressive of the theme of man within nature, a naturalistic theme, rather than simply that of man

at the mercy of his nervous system. It is in effect worth suggesting that the "première lésion organique" may be Zola's equivalent of original sin, a sort of hereditary curse arising from the irreducible fact of man's carnal nature. The Rougons and Macquarts are representatives not so much of their society as of the human race, a species of animal with no innate disposition towards the good. They grow up in a primitive, amoral nature where their instincts remain unchecked: "Elle [Adélaïde] laissa croître ses enfants comme ces pruniers qui poussent le long des routes, au bon plaisir de la pluie et du soleil. Ils portèrent leurs fruits naturels, en sauvageons que la serpe n'a point greffés ni taillés. Jamais la nature ne fut moins contrariée, jamais petits êtres malfaisants ne grandirent plus franchement dans le sens de leurs instincts" (II, 56).

Nature is the central force in Les Rougon-Macquart, and because this force tends to be anarchic, "plus fort que la raison" as we are told in Germinal (V, 116), a strong measure of pessimistic determinism permeates the works. One is too often defeated by powers beyond one's control. Nevertheless, and in all fairness to Zola's comprehensive vision, we must acknowledge the presence of a vein, however small, of hopeful thought. There is a perceptible progress in the series towards an advocacy of primitivism and pastoral regeneration as a remedy for moral and physical decadence. Pascal, for instance, sees the possibility of rebirth for the family in the peasant Jean Macquart of La Terre, who enjoys the simple and unambitious life on a farm. This ideal, which one critic has described pithily as

Rousseauism à rebours,"[8] becomes fully manifest in Les Quatre Evangiles, written at a time when Zola's mature talent had deserted him. But throughout his fiction, from pessimism to idealism, the artist exhibits a distinctly anti-intellectualist bias, an awareness of the perils and ultimate futility of human reason.[9] In the universe of Les Rougon-Macquart we do find thinking heroes, but none of them is free of some sort of psychological imbalance and all of them have sexual inhibitions. There are those who, like Florent of Le Ventre de Paris and Claude and Etienne Lantier, are obsessed by a fixed idea; who, like Serge Mouret and Pascal, yearn for simplicity and innocence; finally, there is the most tortured intellectual figure, Lazare Chanteau, so preoccupied with death and conscience that he denies life, positively fears the nature within himself (the organs of his own body) and beyond himself (the sea, which threatens to flood his village and which he strives to subdue).

The story of Lazare, La Joie de vivre, represents Zola at his most pessimistic: The kind of pessimism here has a strong Schopenhauerian character, with its heavy theme of man's submission to an overwhelming will, and Lazare himself at one point (IV, 1173) approvingly invokes the name of the German philosopher. If there is any "joy" in the novel it must be in the person of Pauline Quenu, who embodies the benevolent side of nature which Lazare cannot see. The ultimate thematic ambiguity of the work is underlined by the two major events of its close, the birth of a child and the death of a woman. Despite Lazare's bilious vision of the baby's future

in a world of fatality, Pauline, with all her strenuous life-affirming faith, insists that he will grow up under her care to realise the true joy of living and repulse the temptation to despair that has subverted Lazare's whole existence: "Celui-là sera peut-être d'une génération moins bête, . . . et il croira qu'on peut vivre, même avec la certitude de mourir un jour" (IV, 1320). But the book does not end with this encouraging note; rather, it ends with the suicide by hanging of Véronique, the family's housekeeper, a peevish old woman who has persistently vacillated between the different factions in the household yet gives us the sense of loyalty and noble endurance. Lazare's world affords no beatitude in this life.

For characters of Les Rougon-Macquart like Lazare, educated and rational, woman is the spirit of nature which they renounce at their peril or ignore at their terrible cost (pace the misogynist Schopenhauer). As Bertrand-Jennings has remarked of Zola's women, "Elles sont la vie; elles ne la pensent pas."[10] They often seem to be free, beneficent spirits of nature, prelapsarian in their innocence or at least, like Hawthorne's Hester, capable of transcending man's fallen conditon. Albine of La Faute de l'abbe Mouret, Pauline of La Joie de vivre, Christine of L'Oeuvre, and Clotilde of Le Docteur Pascal, though different from one another in particular ways, have natural qualities in common that constrast with the self-destructive single-mindedness of the men they love. The most instructive example of the anti-rational and restorative power of woman may be found in the experience of Pascal, the savant whom we saw locking himself away from the world in La Fortune des Rougon. In Le Docteur Pascal, the

last book of the series, he is privileged with a Pisgah vision of the degenerating hereditary line of Rougons and Macquarts. By dint of scientific effort and emotional detachment he is able to conceive of himself apart from his tainted family; but it is his niece, Clotilde, who really liberates him, reconciles him to his body: "Ah!, que n'avait-il vécu! certaines nuits, il arrivait à maudire la science, qu'il accusait de lui avoir pris le meilleur de sa virilité. Il s'etait laissé dévorer par le travail, qui lui avait mangé le cerveau, mangé le coeur, mangé les muscles" (VI, 1265). On the other hand, there is also in Zola's fiction the more powerful image of woman as the negative spirit of nature, whose carnality can enslave and ruin a man. Such a woman is Thérèse of the short story "Pour une nuit d'amour," Renée of La Curée, or, doubtless the most memorable model, Nana. This Babylonian creation, as Flaubert called Nana,[11] embodies with almost mythic intensity the fatality of flesh; far from bringing about a reconciliation between man and nature, she immolates him at the altar of nature. Appropriately, she dies at the hands of her ally, physical nature, when smallpox savages her once alluring body. In the female, then, with her two aspects, we discover a symbol for the morally equivocal nature which encloses man in general and defeats his reason, ideals, and ambitions.

If we are seeking specific examples of sustained naturalistic exploration of the theme of man and nature (given that some are better than others), then the obvious choices would be La Faute de l'abbé Mouret and La Terre, since their dramas occur deep in the countryside and far from the society of the city. La Faute, particularly, should

attract us for the reason that it tells of a man's rebirth into the world of nature, of his progress from first awareness of the vitality of the landscape to his craving for increasingly stronger physical sensations. Furthermore, we may recognise in Serge Mouret's experience of restoring the natural bond the modern theme of original sin and man's hereditary guilt, and invoke illuminating references to Thérèse Raquin, The Scarlet Letter, and "Der blonde Eckbert," where that theme is also dwellt on. But in a sense this way of approach to Zola's naturalism is too easy, too abundant with evidence. And at any rate, the above-mentioned two works by Zola have already been quite fully examined by other critics from the point of view of man's relation to nature. It would probably be more challenging and rewarding to find an illustration from among the works which deal more explicitly with the social world, seemingly further away from the context of naturalism.

The proposition to be justified is that in Zola's fiction of society the social and the natural are one, the former overwhelmed by the latter. La Curée is, it appears to me, a worthy example of such a proposition. The second novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, it concerns itself with the decadent excesses of the Second Empire. Interestingly, Zola had determined to write a study of manners, which quickly lapsed into a study of moral degeneracy, the sickness of progress, science, and industrial and commercial civilisation. The era was one of bitter financial struggles and wild speculation. The author, however, is apparently not so preoccupied with the precise details of the suspicious transactions

in the corridors of the Second Empire (we are not even told much about Aristide Saccard's financial operations) as with the possibility of a grand vision of the period, which he inevitably describes in physical terms. This physical vision is expressed in the very title of the work, which calls to mind a ravening beast stuffing itself endlessly with the ample flesh of capitalist wealth. Zola enlarges on the metaphor in a journalistic piece published two years before the novel: "Ah! quelle curée que le Second Empire! Dès le lendemain du coup d'état . . . ils ont mis les mains aux plats, en plein dans la sauce, mangeant goulûment, s'arrachant les morceaux de la bouche. Ils se sont rués à la satisfaction de leurs appétits, avec un emportement de bête, et lorsqu'ils ont été gorgés, ils ont mangé encore" (XIII, 260). Zola's Empire, unlike the Restoration in Balzac's novels, seems not to be part of history at all. If anything it resembles the end of history, the apocalypse.[12]

The physical appetite for money and power among the patrician inhabitants of this degenerate culture is equalled in bestiality by their lust for pleasure, their need to escape their comfortable boredom once in a while. In the novel Zola describes the lurid spectacle of a society turning itself into an enormous, unruly brothel:

> La grande préoccupation de la société était de savoir à quels amusements elle allait tuer le temps. Selon l'heureuse expression d'Eugène Rougon, Paris se mettait à table et rêvait gaudriole au dessert. La politique épouvantait, comme une drogue dangéreuse. Les esprits lassés se tournaient vers les affaires et les plaisirs. Ceux qui possédaient déterraient leur argent et ceux qui ne possédaient pas cherchaient dans les coins les trésors oubliés.

> Il y avait, au fond de la cohue, un frémissement sourd, un bruit naissant de pièces de cent sous, des rires clairs de femmes, des tintements encore affaiblis de vaisselle et de baisers. . . . L'Empire allait faire de Paris le mauvais lieu de l'Europe. (II, 353)

It is to this world that the three principal characters belong: Aristide, the commissaire-voyer with all the ruthlessness of a Rougon; his second wife Renée, a vain and sensual creature; and his son Maxime, a pretty and languid youth of rather ambiguous sexuality. Aristide supplies the other two with money for their various excesses. The narrative of Aristide's rush for self-enrichment, for the spoils of the Empire, corresponds to his wife's rapacity in pursuit of sensual enjoyment. In that sense, therefore, the two kinds of excessive behaviour are aspects of the same physical necessity (or physiological, as Zola would say). It is a necessity that suggests the excited struggle of the hunting pack to seize the carcass of the fallen animal, la curée.

In fact, considering the progress of the plot, it is clear that Zola is more interested in Renée and her incestuous affair with Maxime than in Aristide and his cupidity. (Zola commits himself to a more elaborate treatment of Aristide in the later work, L'Argent.) This is scarcely surprising in view of what we know of his fascination with the manifestations of physical passion expressed in a work like Thérèse Raquin, or indeed in any of his other novels where sex plays a commanding rôle. In La Curée the theme of incest raises a comparison with the myth of Phaedra, a comparison that Zola himself makes in a letter to Louis Ulbach, editor of the journal which was

serialising the novel: "J'ai voulu, dans cette nouvelle Phèdre, montrer à quel effroyable écroulement on en arrive lorsque les moeurs sont pourries et que les liens de la famille n'existent plus" (II, 556). The important difference, though, between Racine's Phèdre, for instance, and Zola's Renée is that while the former heroine experiences her bitter love through restraint and self-abnegation, the latter feels no such resistance to her desires and casts herself voluntarily into moral degradation, enjoying it, we suspect, precisely because of its profanity. And we would not want to compare Hippolyte with Maxime, a distinctly unheroic and spiritless figure.[13]

With such freedom to do as they please, and later even with the connivance of Aristide, Zola's lovers indulge in a powerfully physical relationship which, though surrounded by aristocratic luxury, seems to be driven by a primitive energy. This element of primitiveness is especially reinforced by the sensual scenes in the hothouse (we could hardly call it a conservatory!), with its exotic flowers, perfumes, and colours. Renée actually appears to us there in the likeness of a Sphinx, half beast and half woman (II, 448), a symbol perhaps not unlike Hawthorne's Faun. The vertiginous proliferation of images strengthens our sense of the chaos of tropical vegetation enveloping the guilty pair. Effectively, the earth participates in their carnal desires:

> Maxime et Renée, les sens faussés, se sentaient emportés dans ces noces puissantes de terre. Le sol, à travers la peau d'ours, leur brûlait le dos, et, des hautes palmes, tombaient sur eux des gouttes de chaleur. . . . C'était alors, au milieu de la lueur pâle, que des visions les

> hébétaient, des cauchemars dans lesquels ils assistaient longuement aux amours des Palmiers et des Fougères; les feuillages prenaient des apparences confuses et équivoques, que leurs désirs fixaient en images sensuelles; des murmures, des chuchotements leur venaient des massifs, voix pâmées, soupirs d'extase, cris étouffés de de douleur, rires lointains, tout ce que leurs propres baisers avaient de bavard, et que l'écho leur renvoyait. Parfois ils se croyaient secoués par un tremblement du sol, comme si la terre elle-meme, dans une crise d'assouvissement, eût éclaté en sanglots voluptueux. (II, 451)

Here the relation between the human lovemaking and the vision of erotic nature has a Gothic intensity. External nature is figured as an objectification of Renée's and Maxime's passion. We recall how well nature could accommodate the terrors evoked in Emily's perfervid imagination in The Mysteries of Udolpho; or, even better, Hawthorne's forest, whose wildness and unexplored depths symbolise the uncivilised part of man's essential character. Zola's images of boundless fecundity do not, of course, have quite the allegorical significance of Tieck's and Hawthorne's presentation of the natural world, but they do preserve the Gothic hallucinatory quality which serves, in naturalistic art, to connect man's emotions to their primitive origin.

It must be that the climax of the novel, the event that draws the three protagonists into a single crisis, is the fancy-dress ball at the Saccards'. On that occasion M. Hupel de la Noue presents his dramatic poem Les Amours du beau Narcisse et de la nymphe Echo, whose three tableaux bring together in symbolic confluence the two powerful themes of the book, sex and money. These are the object of desire in which the natural instincts of Zola's characters seek

fulfilment. If there is one image that resumes most completely the meaning of such an object it is the second tableau, depicting the infernal grotto of Plutus, a crevice in a mine of molten metals:

> La soie imitant le roc montrait de larges filons métalliques, des coulées qui étaient comme les veines du vieux monde, charriant les richesses incalculables et la vie éternelle du sol. A terre, par un anachronisme hardi de M. Hupel de la Noue, il y avait un écroulement de pièces de vingt francs; des louis étalés, des louis entassés, un pullulement de louis qui montaient. Au sommet de ce tas d'or, Mme de Guende, en Plutus, était assise, Plutus femme, Plutus montrant sa gorge, dans les grandes lames de sa robe, prises à tous les métaux. (II, 499)

Suitably enough Maxime and Renée play the eponymous rôles, the rôles that they are playing in the drama of their own relations: Narcissus distant and disdainful, Echo supplicatory and voluptuous, dying of frustrated desire.

If La Curée is in any sense a chapter of social history then it must be one that portrays a society where moral decay allows base human instincts to remain unchecked. This is very obviously not the world of Le Rouge et le noir or Middlemarch. The author's temperament, the irrespressible physicality of his vision, takes the theme of the novel far beyond the realistic concern with a tableau de moeurs to a point where society is itself subordinated to nature. Yet such a conclusion is no more nor less than what can be said finally of most of Zola's fiction. As Aimé Guedj concedes in a discussion of Zola's invariable depiction of the contemporary social order, "La nature . . . échappe evidemment à la société comme elle échappe à l'histoire. C'est pourquoi, bien qu'il

fasse appel à l'histoire et a la société, le naturalisme n'a pas de dimension historique et sociale."[14]

Proving the naturalistic basis of La Curée has turned out to be a relatively easy task. But what about a work like Germinal, so close to contemporary social and political reality? Possibly the most heavily documented novel of Les Rougon-Macquart, Germinal revolves around the struggles of the inhabitants of a mining community in northern France for social justice; it tells of their incipient rebellious stirrings against the management, encouraged by the hero Etienne Lantier, their long and painful strike, and their defeat at the hands of soldiers sent to suppress them. The condition of these workers--underpaid, underfed, overworked, and living in terrible squalor--is so wretched that the reader is compelled not only to sympathise with their revolt but also to execrate the kind of capitalism which can oppress so many people and with such savagery. In reading the novel we cannot honestly attribute most of the responsibility for the crisis to the bourgeois characters, who are not represented uniformly as evil figures, and who, despite the degree of power they have over the workers, appear themselves to be at the mercy of socio-economic forces. Given therefore Zola's evident sense that the causes of the miners' misery must reach deep into the nature of contemporary society, may we not legitimately view Germinal as tending towards an advocacy of social revolution, one that would bring about the eventual triumph of workers' rights?

This is in fact more or less the conclusion of many critics

of the work, who want to see its significance in the epic challenge to the established social order. Angus Wilson, for instance, asserts that the novel shows the strength of the proletariat against the bourgeois system;[15] Elliott M. Grant insists on the hope for mankind that proceeds from Zola's portrayal of social conflict;[16] and, quoting the very last lines of the book, M.A. Goldberg calls its author "a prophet of the social revolution that has been taking place this century."[17] Now from a naturalistic point of view, these responses, though not exactly invalid, are inadequate, for they do not go far enough, they fail to recognise that the society of Germinal is immersed in physical nature. Politics begin and end in nature, and human aspirations are ultimately at its mercy. For this reason I am inclined to reject the notion of an optimistic note in the novel, even at the end. Those crucial concluding lines may be interpreted as more ambivalent about the future than plainly optimistic: "Des hommes poussaient, une armée noire, vengeresse, qui germait lentement dans les sillons, grandissant pour les récoltes du siècle futur, et dont la germination allait faire bientôt éclater la terre" (V, 405). The consciousness here seems to me to be that of the narrator, whose voice frequently détaches itself from Etienne's experience. This discrimination is significant because it must arise from an acknowledgement that not all of the book's theme resides in the hero's point of view, that there is another voice beyond his which has no such politically idealistic tone. Thus, the image of the black, avenging army sundering the earth, with its suggestion of possible catastrophe and chaos, does not appear to belong to the consciousness of Etienne, whose vision of the future tends

at the end towards the affirmative and hopeful: "Ah! quel réveil de vérité et de justice!" (V, 404), he exclaims to himself on leaving Montsou. That Etienne's social beliefs, distinct from his basic humanitarianism, limit his reliability as an interpreter of the novel's experience, is proven by the presence of multiple images of a superior, amoral nature. The critics who, adopting solely the hero's point of view, stress the social context neglect this more important aspect. I think, finally, we can accept Zola's own clue to the meaning of Germinal which he vouchsafes in a letter to Edouard Rod; he says that in writing the work it was "nécessaire de mettre au-dessus de l'éternelle injustice des classes l'éternelle douleur des passions" (XIV, 1440).

But anyway, like Zola's other contemplative figures mentioned earlier, Etienne is not wholly intellectual, controlling his own destiny. Although a "soldat raisonneur de la révolution" (V, 403), absolutely committed to the achievement of social justice, he is yet a creature of instinct. We recall, of course, that Etienne is the son of the washerwoman Gervaise Macquart of L'Assommoir, and so born with a hereditary inclination towards drunkenness and homicidal mania, an inclination which he manages to resist most of the time. The one moment that he succumbs to his murderous instinct, his "besoin de tuer" (V, 387), occurs when, incarcerated in the infernal darkness of the flooded mine, he smashes the skull of his enemy Chaval. His physical being, however, since it has a beneficent side too, may be said to dispose him to deeper sympathy with the people

among whom he lives and whose misery and exhaustion he shares. Etienne feels that these people are part of nature, of the earth, and therefore capable of immense strength. Rebellion becomes an instinctive necessity; not a rational response to society but, as Maheu expresses it, something "au fond de sa poitrine" (V, 182).

Very often in the novel the beneficent aspect of nature is associated, particularly in Etienne's consciousness, with the political struggle of the miners and seems in fact to give birth to and nurture this race of heroes:

> . . . à present, le mineur s'éveillait au fond, germait dans la terre ainsi qu'une vraie graine, et l'on verrait un matin ce qu'il pousserait au beau milieu des champs: oui, il pousserait des hommes, une armée d'hommes qui rétabliraient la justice. . . . Ah! ça poussait petit à petit une rude moisson d'hommes, qui mûrissait au soleil! (V, 144-5)

Here, in their early mood of social idealism, Etienne identifies the miners with the spring; they are "germinal." Later, in the midst of their strike when they meet in the forest clearing, their young demagogue implies a fundamental sympathy between nature and the cause of justice in his exclamation to the assembled host that they will not be silenced:

> "Camerades, puisqu'on nous défend de parler, puisqu'on nous envoie les gendarmes, comme si nous étions des brigands, c'est ici qu'il faut nous entendre! Ici, nous sommes libres, nous sommes chez nous, personne ne viendra nous faire taire, pas plus qu'on ne fait taire les oiseaux et les bêtes!" (V, 228)

As the crisis deepens and hunger grows, the connection between nature and the people becomes more explicit. These men, women,

and children appear to spring from the earth to wreak vengeance on their bourgeois masters. Marching across the plain, they impress the frightened onlookers as a terrible destructive force (which it must be for the managerial class), "une force de la nature" (V, 277). The phrase is echoed towards the end when Etienne, though surrounded by defeat, finds that he can still dream of "une nouvelle terre" and wants to guide the people, "cette force de la nature qui se dévorait elle-même" (V, 398).

The earth, however, may not always be so reassuring to those who are oppressed; like Etienne himself, as physical being, it is at once creative and destructive--destructive of everything, not merely the bourgeoisie. In Germinal the earth is frequently conceived by the independent narrator as an avenging spirit that would annihilate its own kin, the miners. The people are starving, but so too is the mine, Le Voreux, the greedy, voracious one, with an insatiable appetite for humans. Zola's symbol for the primal strength and dominance of nature, the pit has mythic proportions which infuse the whole novel.[18] Insofar as it exists in the collective imagination of the miners, Le Voreux is a presiding deity with manifold characteristics and an uncertain temperament. Jean Borie elaborates on the myth in psycho-sexual terms, portraying the mine as a colossal hermaphrodite monster, "à la fois père et mère, sorte de femme phallique, gueule ouverte, chargée de menace castratrice."[19] It may be thought to embody both the masculine and feminine principles in nature. At any rate, whatever our interpretation

of the peculiar power of Le Voreux, we know that it is greedy for flesh and blood, and never more so than when it has been deliberately wounded. Thus when Souvarine, the anarchist, injures the mine by sabotaging the wooden casings in the shaft which hold back the torrent of water, it responds with devastating vengeance. The victims of the ensuing disaster, with their instinctive feeling for the earth, seem to know what is happening in nature: "Des croyances endormies se réveillaient dans ces âmes éperdues, ils invoquaient la terre, c'était la terre qui se vengeait, qui lâchait ainsi le sang de la veine, parce qu'on lui avait tranché une artère" (V, 381). Catherine, a few pages later, uses much the same words to express her delirious sense of the presence of the Homme noir, a superstitious figure who strangles wicked girls: "Tiens! il est là . . .," she cries into the darkness. "La terre a lâché tout le sang de la veine, pour se venger de ce qu'on lui a coupé une artère" (V, 393). (The image of the Homme noir in Germinal deserves to be compared with that of the Black Man of Puritan superstition in Hawthorne's fiction, who also resides in physical nature--the forest--and is a fearsome symbol of moral chaos. Such comparisons should never be taken too far, but they do underline the similarity of imagination in artists of a naturalistic hue.)

It is the earth, then, which is the true hero of the novel, and it is the earth which must accept final responsibility for the mining disaster as well as for the general wretchedness of the workers. As I have already insisted, we cannot assign all the blame to the managers, who, admittedly, ought to have strengthened the casings

in the pit after so long a time without inspection, and ought to have perceived the need for improvement in the worker's conditions. Responding to the theme of man's ultimate impotence, we sense the presence in Germinal of a transcendent possessive power to which all human beings are not only related but also surrendered. Hemmings is surely right when he explains the crises of the novel by reference to "an impenetrable First Cause, deaf to supplication and unamenable to reason."[20] This First Cause manifests itself even in the climactic confrontation between the manager Hennebeau and the delegation of miners in the former's house, an episode when we would expect to witness a vigorous factual discussion about ways to resolve the disagreement. After Hennebeau has protested that there is nothing he can do, that he too follows orders ("Je suis un salarié come vous"), Etienne asks where they should apply to if not to him. Gesturing in the air, Hennebeau replies, "Il faut aller là-bas":

> Les délégués avaient suivi son geste vague, sa main tendue vers une des fenêtres. Où était-ce, là-bas? Paris sans doute. Mais ils ne le savaient pas au juste, cela se reculait dans un lointain terrifiant, dans une contrée inaccessible et religieuse, où trônait le dieu inconnu, accroupi au fond de son tabernacle. Jamais, ils ne le verraient, ils le sentaient seulement comme une force qui, de loin, pesait sur les dix mille charbonniers de Montsou. Et quand le directeur parlait, c'était cette force qu'il avait derrière lui, cachée et rendant des oracles. (V, 184-5)

The ultimate responsibility for this catastrophe is thus something more distant than "head office" or "Paris," more abstract than "capitalism," more powerful than "society." It lies with the unknown, crouching god, a primordial creative and destructive genius

who, though only a figure of the miners' imagination, yet represents omnipotent nature itself.

The "dieu inconnu, acroupi au fond de son tabernacle" is exactly the kind of image that Zola's naturalistic mind would conjure up to convey a sense of human submission to the earth. Since the image springs from the passions of men and women, it cannot be considered to have an objective existence. In this respect it resembles the demonic character Coppelius in Hoffmann's Der Sandmann, who, we remember from Klara's explanation in the tale, is conceivably a "dunkle physische Macht" of entirely subjective origin, a phantom of one's own being.[21] Given Zola's preoccupation with the physical origin of the human species, the power of the irrational or subrational, it is no wonder that such subjective, dream-like images recur in his oeuvre. We know from our previous naturalistic readings the extent to which primal emotions may dislocate external reality. In Les Rougon-Macquart these emotions contribute to a massive fresco painted by an epic imagination.

Zola surpasses other naturalistic visionaries in his comprehension of the phenomena of life which unite mankind to nature: not only sex and fertility, but also disease, pain, and death. Joy and optimism, ambitions and ideals, progress and civilisation are all circumscribed by nature. Yet, even despite the absence of a beneficent God and despite the amoral force of nature, Les Rougon-Macquart does not absolutely deny hope. The death of Pascal and the birth of his son at the end of the final volume suggest the

possibility of human renewal. This last moment is not clearly triumphant, but then it is not clearly pessimistic either.

Notes to Chapter Five

1. Winston Hewitt, Through Those Living Pillars: Man and Nature in the Works of Emile Zola (The Hague: Mouton, 1974); Jean Borie, Zola et les mythes, ou de la nausée au salut (Paris: Seuil, 1971); Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, L'Eros et la femme chez Zola: De la chute au paradis retrouvé (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977).

2. For my discussion of Thérèse Raquin I must acknowledge a debt to John C. Lapp's chapter on the work in his Zola before the Rougon-Macquart (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 88-120.

3. "Monstre endormi" is the phrase used by Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Thérèse Raquin, ou le péché originel," Littérature, No. 21 (octobre 1976), p. 95.

4. In this connection see Robert J. Niess: "Essentially, The Scarlet Letter and Zola's work are studies of the effects of remorse in the human mind, remorse not repentance--for in neither study do the principal characters ever openly repent of their actions--psychological novels dependent for their verity on the insuperable force of memory and the undying sense of guilt, and both are built entirely on the repression of an awful secret." "Hawthorne and Zola--An Influence?," Revue de Littérature Comparée, 27 (1953), 451.

5. See John C. Lapp, "Taine et Zola: autour d'une correspondance," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 87 (1957), pp. 319-26.

6. F.W.J. Hemmings, Emile Zola, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 48-9.

7. For a rewarding discussion of Zola's "imagination physiologique" see Michel Butor, "Emile Zola et la flamme bleue," Critique (Paris), No. 239 (1967), pp. 407-37.

8. A.E. Carter, The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 78. On the question of Zola's Rousseauism see also Pierre-Henri Simon, "Un des derniers disciples de Rousseau," Les Cahiers Naturalistes, No. 38 (1969), pp. 105-14.

9. See particularly David Baguley, "L'Anti-intellectualisme de Zola," Les Cahiers Naturalistes, No. 42 (1971), pp. 119-29.

10. L'Eros et la femme chez Zola, p. 46.

11. Hemmings, op. cit., p. 137.

12. See Borie, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

13. Sara Via discusses this topic in "Une Phèdre décadente chez

les naturalistes," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 153 (1974), pp. 29-38.

14, Aimé Guedj, "Diderot et Zola," Europe, Nos. 468-9 (avril-mai 1968), p. 298.

15. Angus Wilson, Emile Zola: An Introductory Study of his Novels (New York: William Morrow, 1952), pp. 114-16.

16. Elliott M. Grant, "Germinal": A Critical and Historical Study (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 39, 135.

17. M.A. Goldberg, "Zola and Social Revolution: A Study of Germinal," The Antioch Review, 27 (1967-8), 491-507.

18. For views of the mythic pattern in Germinal see, for example, Marcel Girard, "L'Univers de Germinal," Revue des Sciences Humaines, Fasc. 69 (1953), pp. 59-76; Gerhard Ledig, "Ein danteskes Kapitel aus Zolas Germinal," Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch, 23 (1954), 87-93; Henri Mitterand, "L'idéologie du mythe dans Germinal," Problèmes de l'analyse textuelle (Paris: Didier, 1971), pp. 83-91; Rachelle Rosenberg, "The Slaying of the Dragon: An archetypal Study of Zola's Germinal," Symposium, 36 (1972), 349-62; Philip Walker, "Prophetic Myths in Zola," PMLA, 74 (1959), 444-52; Melvin Zimmerman, "L'homme et la nature dans Germinal," Les Cahiers Naturalistes, 18 (1972), 212-62.

19. Borie, op. cit., p. 110.

20. Hemmings, op. cit., p. 180.

21. E.T.A. Hoffmann, Werke, ed. Gisela Spiekerkötter (Köln: Luzia Prösdorf, 1965), I, 304.

CHAPTER SIX

Naturalism in Turn-of-the-Century American Fiction

> Puis, vois-tu, Durtal, [le naturalisme] n'est pas qu'inexpert et obtus, il est fétide, car il a prôné cette vie moderne atroce, vanté l'américanisme nouveau de nos moeurs, abouti à l'éloge de la force brutale, à l'apothéose du coffre-fort.[1]

This apparently glib sentiment, voiced by one of Huysmans' many representatives in his fiction, contains a fascinating suggestion. Ignoring the tone of hyperbolic disgust which we may expect from the aestheticist and naturalist manqué, we are struck by the idea that Zola's naturalism (for his name is implied in Huysmans' debate) reflects and promotes an "Americanisation" of manners. By "Americanisation" Huysmans means presumably, besides the exaltation of brute strength and money, the decline in traditional ethical restraints and the rise of democracy and the rights of the individual. As a Catholic he would deplore the assault on institutional religion entailed in the growth of unmystical, secular values; as an artist he would argue that such values are characteristic of a country where art is dead or dying.

Huysmans' view of America and the effects of Americansiation was no doubt common in France after Toqueville. His view of naturalism as "obtus" and "fétide" was also common. But his proposition that there is something American about French naturalism has more than a degree of truth in it, since Zola's physical determinism, though

it has little to do with democracy, does abolish traditional values, does not shrink before power, money, and a contemporary social setting. Uncannily enough, however, the proposition is yet more true of American naturalism, which is the legitimate successor to its French relative. In the following pages I would like to examine the mutation of naturalism in America at the turn of the century, paying particular attention to the theme of the "force brutale." Huysmans could never know just how American naturalism would become.

With the question of influence I am not much concerned here. Lars Åhnebrink's ponderous study has treated the subject exhaustively[2] --in fact to the point of exaggeration, as most critics now agree. Norris was the only writer to show the direct influence of Zola, but it did not radically inform his fiction and he never accepted the doctrine. The Americans found naturalism by their own lights. In the matter of its adherents, the American naturalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is less easy to define than its French predecessor. A recent book of essays, claiming to be a reassessment of American naturalism, includes studies on writers like Edgar Watson Howe, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, and Nelson Algren, in addition to Crane, Norris, and Dreiser.[3] It is not uncommon to see Ernest Hemingway placed within the naturalistic tradition. For the purposes of the present chapter I do not propose to call the roll of all the American novelists who have been termed naturalists, especially since most of them are about as relevant to our developing theme as Henri Céard or Edouard Rod:

rather, I shall concentrate on the three artists who, it seems to me, do relate to this theme in a particular way, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser. Among these figures we can find no uniformly held formal principles, aesthetic or ideological. There was nothing in their case equivalent to the "Groupe de Médan," no manifesto, to which we might refer in our judgements and generalisations. As in the study of naturalism in Zola, we must avoid regarding the American variety as a school with a fixed number of members and a clearly circumscribed set of ideas.

So, without speaking of international influence or of a school of writers and ideas, how do we account for the recurrence of naturalism in the 1890s in America? The question is all the more worth asking in view of the massive transformations that were wrought after the age of Poe and Hawthorne, transformations which would obviously affect the common attitude to nature, the wilderness. In the last decades of the nineteenth century we see the acceleration of economic growth associated with advances in technology and industrialisation; we see the rise of the great cities with their heterodox social values. The reason for the continuity of a naturalistic strain in American literature must lie in the survival of a consciousness that can conceive of man apart from social progress, a willingness still to place man in the broad context of nature even while acknowledging the power of technology. Aware of the vitality of this dialectic in nineteenth-century American literature, Leo Marx in his book The Machine in the Garden pursues its

various manifestations in writers from Emerson to Henry Adams.[4] Because he is more concerned with the opposition between the Arcadian image of nature, the pastoral ideal, and the demon of technology, Marx does not discuss at any length the amoral, darker view of nature. Nevertheless, such a view is characteristic of Hawthorne, Melville, and Norris (all treated by Marx) who, though recognising the destructive potential of the machine and man's use of it, yet regard nature as the superior power. This is the naturalistic vision. The appeal to literary pastoralism is certainly an illuminating critical approach to the relations between nature, technology, and man in the American imagination, but it does not account for the current of thought which assumes the existence of an omnipotent, ambivalent nature. The continuity of the naturalistic tradition in America may become clearer if we see Crane, Norris, and Dreiser as legatees of the dark romanticism of artists like Poe and Hawthorne.

Now although the earlier and later naturalists share a conception of man determined by an invincible physical nature, they do differ in significant respects within this philosophical purview. The direction of the shift from the naturalism of Hawthorne to that of Crane could be marked by a reference to Oliver Wendell Holmes, a novelist rarely read nowadays, whose "genteel" fiction falls between the two phases of American literature and embodies something of the spirit of both of them. His novel Elsie Venner (1861), for instance, is arguably a work of transition in the progress of American

naturalism. It tells of a mysteriously beautiful girl who was poisoned *in utero* by rattlesnake venom, and as she matures she assumes some serpentine characteristics. At once compellingly attractive and fearsomely solitary (shades of Poe's fey heroines!), Elsie can mesmerise a person by gazing into his eyes, and can disappear on a snake-infested mountain for days and return unharmed. This feral creature, until her death, is at the mercy of instincts beyond her rational command. As a story about the fatality of flesh and a secular interpretation of the myth of the fall of man with a touch of Gothic fancifulness, *Elsie Venner* bears some resemblance to Poe's and Hawthorne's fiction. Yet in its conscious argument about the notion of limited responsibility for harmful actions committed as a result of one's immutable nature, it leans towards the deterministic naturalism of the later writers who belong to the age of American Darwinism. For Elsie is more akin to Dreiser's Carrie than to Hester Prynne: though a spirit of nature, she has a character without psychology, empty of passion, and determined by an external force.

Reading Holmes's "Second Preface" to the novel (1886) we cannot avoid thinking of the doctrinaire Zola. The American author, who was also a physician, retrospectively imposes on his work a note of scientific experimentalism of the sort which his transatlantic contemporary would want to applaud:

> The real aim of the story was to test the doctrine of "original sin" and human responsibility for the disordered volition coming under that technical

> denomination. Was Elsie Venner, poisoned by a crotalus before she was born, morally responsible for the "volitional" aberrations, which translated into acts become what is known as sin, and, it may be, what is punished as crime? If, on presentation of the evidence, she becomes by verdict of human conscience a proper object of divine pity and not of divine wrath, as a subject of moral poisoning, wherein lies the difference between her position at the bar of judgment, human or divine, and that of the unfortunate victim who received a moral poison from a remote ancestor before he drew his first breath?[5]

Like Zola, Holmes wants, in a spirit of modern scientific enquiry, to assign physical causes to moral conditions; thus he calls his tale "a physiological romance."[6] But in practice, of course, this experimental idea never assumes dominance over the narrative, and we find ourselves less interested in physical heredity than in the metaphor of original sin which is created through Elsie's character.

The reference to romance here may remind us of another connection between the two naturalistic phases in America. For Crane, Norris, and Dreiser were all romancers, aware that their sensibility urged them beyond the merely social confines of the traditional novel, beyond the ordinary. According to Norris, for example, in a penetrating article entitled "Zola as a Romantic Writer":

> The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of a naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out, in blood, and in sudden death.[7]

The persistence of romance, with its naturalistic outlook, gives us

to believe that even after Appomattox and the disappearance of the frontier, and with the development of a middle-class commercial and industrial society, America was still not generating a literary realism comparable to Europe's. It was, we recall, in search of such a realism--the realism of Balzac and Turgenev--that Henry James left America. Far from seeking the realism that only emerges from a long social tradition, Crane, Norris, and Dreiser were attracted to the "vast and terrible drama" of the romance. The society in their fiction is merely sketched, not the concrete historical reality which Balzac portrays; there seem to be in it no palpable manners and morals that might lead us to recognise a contemporary social norm. It appears that this society without definition is itself subject to some stronger, supra-rational force, which, like Norris's locomotive, hurtles through a human community powerless to resist it and uncertain where it comes from. It is a force with a capacity to thwart personal ambition, subvert idealism, overwhelm moral values. With these American writers we are precipitated into a world of inevitable defeat, a world a good deal more pessimistic than our previous naturalistic readings have presented.

Indeed, a theme of defeat is what above all characterises the turn-of-the-century naturalism. This theme springs directly from the artists' commitment to pessimistic determinism, which is a familiar point of reference in the discussion of American naturalism. Malcolm Cowley has a fair enough definition of it: "The naturalistic writers were all determinists in that they believed in the

omnipotence of abstract forces. They were pessimists so far as they believed that men and women were absolutely incapable of shaping their own destinies."[8] The forces that constitute this immense determinism are evidently external to the human personality, acting on it from outside in nature or the cosmos, and as such they differ from the physical forces which course through the fiction of Zola and previous naturalists. To illustrate the crucial difference we might cast our comparative eye on the varying approaches to degeneration, an established naturalistic motif. In Hoffmann (Brother Medardus), Poe (Ligeia, Roderick Usher), Hawthorne (Dimmesdale), and Zola (Gervaise, Jacques Lantier), degeneration is shown to be internal, psycho-physical. The narrator always fixes our attention, if only by external description, on the thing inside his character: the demon or beast which is guilt, sexual desire, or torpor. In American naturalism of the nineties and beyond we come across a comparable kind of degeneration, in Crane's George Kelcey, Norris's McTeague and Vandover, Dreiser's Hurstwood. It is clearly a degeneration through self-indulgence of one kind or another; but its psycho-physical dimensions are never deeply explored, never unequivocally situated in the body. Although certain characters may behave like animals, they do not lead us into a contemplation of the fatality of flesh. Rather, they allow us to perceive the omnipotent, abstract force behind all human life, a force of nature I would call it. This then is the general distinctiveness of turn-of-the-century American naturalism: Crane, Norris, and Dreiser are, relatively, less interested in man as a physical or physiological

entity than their European and American forerunners. The physical is disembodied, externalised, turned into a cosmic power.

Whereas Zola relates man to nature through his flesh, the Americans demonstrate an almost Puritan fear of the body and prefer to establish a direct and simple relation between helpless man and the force of nature: it is not man's body that connects him with nature but his being. Sexual passion, therefore, does not count for a significant theme in their naturalism. True enough, it does appear, briefly, in McTeague in the familar guise of a brute, a monster inhabiting the body and persistently threatening to break loose from its bonds. Such is the power which begins to conquer the dim-witted McTeague as he looks upon the beautiful form of Trina Sieppe asleep in his dentist's chair. "Why," he wonders, "could he not always love her purely, cleanly? What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh?"[9] A comparison with Zola's treatment of the beast of human sexuality may suggest itself here. Norris, however, chooses not to develop this theme and instead canalises the physical passions of the novel into overwhelming greed--not a greed peculiar to the protagonist but an abstract principle. Contrasting the American work with, say, La Curée, we can see how much superior were Zola's creative resources and abilities, managing the parallel themes of sex and greed as manifestations of the same primal instinct. American naturalism of Norris's time is infuriatingly non-sexual.[10] Even in The Scarlet Letter, where the violence of physical passion is spent before the story begins, sexuality is at least present in image and symbol.

These are the principal differentia of the naturalism which figures forth in the fiction of Crane, Norris, and Dreiser: the brute, abstract force of nature, pessimism, and external determinism. Before exploring the American naturalism in some particular literary works it would be wise to emphasise that the literature does not so much reflect contemporary ideas as refract them; it was produced in the pervasive intellectual atmosphere of evolutionism and the many interpretations of Darwin and Spencer, but it fails to realise completely the spirit of optimism that informs American concepts of the descent of man and the progress of civilisation. I am especially concerned to make this point because a certain modern perspective on American naturalism, which I want to engage a bit later, has claimed to see in the novels a robustly affirmative purpose corresponding to the evolutionary optimism of the age.

Among the most important interpreters of Darwin and evolutionary philosophy in America was John Fiske, the populariser of science and history. Although as a scientist he could accept the facts of biological evolution and the repudiation of the Newtonian system, as a good Christian he could hardly accept their implication for institutional religion and the dignity of man. He did not wish to see his God banished from the universe nor man removed from the exalted position of end and purpose of creation and placed among the anthropoids. Exemplifying a characterically American capacity to merge practicality with mysticism or sentimentality (in the literature of

the time Norris would be a fair illustration of this), Fiske assumed the task of bringing about a reconciliation between evolution and religion and philosophy. Evolution, he argued, could confirm religious faith by yielding scientific evidence for man's intuitions: it reveals the existence of a progress in nature, a progress which is ultimately controlled by God. Such is the way by which God makes things come to pass. Understood, therefore, as a kind of divine agency, evolution works for the good of man, a perfectible creature: "He [God] sees that in the deadly struggle for existence which has raged through aeons of time, the whole creation has been groaning and travailing to bring forth that last consummate specimen of God's handiwork, the Human Soul."[11]

For Fiske and many of his fellow thinkers in the last three decades of the century Darwin and Spencer filled the philosophical vacancy left by the decline of transcendentalism. "Between them," as Henry Steele Commager aptly puts it, "Darwin and Spencer exercised such sovereignty over America as George III had never enjoyed."[12] In an age of ascendent materialism, whose deities were science and industry, evolutionary philosophy could be made to defend the supremacy of man. Spencer was particularly welcome in America because he viewed man as evolving, not only biologically by psychologically and socially, from primitive society to civilisation, and onwards to eventual perfection. Despite its evident threat to the bases of orthodox belief, and also despite its portrayal of a cruel nature, the Spencerian doctrine of evolution was yet assimilable by many

American minds to their religious sense of optimism. By eliminating the unfit among human beings in society nature was gradually making things better for mankind. That nature was conceivably a benevolent shaping spirit offered appreciable comfort to Fiske and those of his generation who, with religious or secular sensibility, sought scientific reassurance for their apprehensions about man's destiny. But far from being confined to the studies and lecture halls of the nation, Spencer's ideas found an audience in virtually every sphere of American life in this epoch of colossal social transformation. Conscious of the marvellous benefits to American culture of these ideas, Edward Livingston Youmans, Fiske's colleague and editor of the Popular Science Monthly, was emphatic in his admiration for Spencer. As he wrote to the Englishman, "I am an ultra and thoroughoing American. I believe there is great work to be done here for civilization. What we want are [sic] ideas--and I believe there is no other man whose thoughts are so valuable for our needs as yours are."[13]

In these words we can already hear the note of vulgarisation which was to sound through much of the American public debate about evolutionary theory. Spencer's absolute advocacy of laissez-faire capitalism as one manifestation of the law of survival of the fittest could be made to support the spirit of free enterprise. Individualism was raised to the status of natural law. Like William James's pragmatism, which in fact opposed it, Spencerian evolution was translated into an apology for dubious commercial, moral, and political

values and a justification for the philosophy of success. Something of this vulgarisation certainly crept into the novels of Jack London, who alone among those commonly called American naturalists can be said to have had a consciously maintained "doctrine." Informed by his reading of the evolutionists, especially Spencer, London's conception of the world shows an awareness of the absolute necessity of physical power as a condition of human survival. In his extravagant vision of man's or animal's struggle for existence there is no room for weakness. Among London's human characters, Wolf Larsen of The Sea Wolf is doubtless the most remarkable, a sadist and unscrupulous adventurer who feels himself to be in vital competition with other men and the rest of nature. Yet what distinguishes Larsen from many of the naturalistic heroes and heroines of Crane, Norris, and Dreiser is his mind, his capacity for thought: despite his amorality and elemental cruelty, he has education and intelligence enough to control his fate and assume responsibility for what he does. Fully conscious, Larsen competes with nature in order to dominate it.

This is a significant point. London's particular adaptation of Spencer, like that of many of his contemporaries, gives man the chance to conquer nature. Paradoxical as it may seem, the determinism in the doctrine of the survival of the fittest assures free will to the physically strongest, to the most ambitious, to the most efficient and competitive, in short to any individual who has the will to power. It is only a short logical step from this

belief in the potentiality of human strength to the kind of scientific optimism which grew into favour in post-bellum America. The imperative of self-preservation, now established as a natural law, may justify any scientific or technological measure to ensure survival. After all, was not the progress of human intelligence also a natural law? Whereas it recognises the situation of man inescapably within nature, such an account does imply that man cannot exist as a passive entity, that he must oppose himself to the rest of nature and strive to vanquish it, raise himself above it. The whole of nature is fair game; it yields no intrinsic privileges or rights. In the words of the sociologist William Graham Sumner, Spencer's most strenuous defender in America, "there can be no rights against Nature except to get out of her whatever we can, which is only the fact of the struggle for existence started over again."[14] The literary naturalism of the turn of the century does not embody this sentiment, this faith in the eternal possibility of man's triumph over nature; rather, it tends to express a sense of impotence in the face of the great mystery, and prefers to depict human beings at the mercy of instinct or of some other unnameable cosmic force. At any rate, as in Zola, there is little question of man's dominating nature. Naturalistic artists like Crane, Norris, and Dreiser carry the intuition that no human artifice--nothing from Rappaccini's garden, as it were-- can confound the force of nature as they conceive it.

There is one critical approach which would not entirely accept such an easy distinction of the philosophical awareness of the lit-

erature from that of the culture. It is Walcutt's contention, for instance, that American naturalism represents a post-transcendentalist tension between the optimism of the American dream and the inevitable doubts about its attainability; "between defying nature and submitting to it, between celebrating man's impulses and trying to educate them, between embracing the universe and regarding it with terror."[15] This, of course, is the concept of the "divided stream," to which I have had occasion to refer already in my earlier chapter on Poe and Hawthorne. Walcutt argues that the ultimate optimism of American naturalistic writing may be grasped if we adopt the point of view of the scientist-reformer. This person would want to accept two assumptions: that man's estate needs improvement, and that the material causes of human conditions are explorable, understandable, and controllable. The best way to validate such assumptions, in Walcutt's view, is to compose a tragedy in which man is assailed by forces beyond his powers of comprehension and control: thus "the more helpless the individual and the more clearly the links in an inexorable chain of causation are defined, the more effectively documented are the two assumptions which underlie the scientists' program of reform, for the destruction of an individual demonstrates the power of heredity and environment over human destinies."[16] Accordingly, a naturalistic novel of pessimistic determinism may, in the light of scientific purpose, yield grounds for optimism.[17]

Now Walcutt's conception of naturalism is all very well if we could believe that naturalistic fiction actually defines a chain of causation in the experience it deals with. Yet it does not, at

least not in the sense that Walcutt intends. Zola makes an attempt to portray the causes behind the actions of his characters, but, as we have observed, these causes reside finally in human nature itself, in man's physical passion, which is not something available to correction by scientific domination or social reform. Heredity and environment are not shown with any vivid emphasis to be the cause of alcoholism in L'Assommoir; if they were, we might optimistically begin speaking of reform. In the works of Crane, Norris, and Dreiser causation is, generally speaking, even more abstractly defined. What we find there is the presence of an impersonal force which shapes the destinies of men and women and which cannot be said to spring specifically from the nature of contemporary society: Norris's central symbol of the Octopus, clutching at the soil, seems to emerge from the darkness beyond man and his ethics; we can discern no ultimate environmental or hereditary motive for Clyde's murder of Roberta in Dreiser's An American Tragedy. In subsequent argument I hope that the legitimacy of this attitude to the American naturalistic novel will become clear. In a word, however, there is in the fiction of naturalism no evidence of the sort of causation that might be seized on by a reformer-scientist, no suggestion of an improvable society to which man may make an independent contribution. At any rate, we must agree with Donald Pizer's opinion that Walcutt is more concerned with the historical and philosophical context of the naturalistic works than with the works themselves. Walcutt does not describe how the divided stream is realized in fictional practice.[18]

Pizer in fact has his own reasons for insisting on a degree of optimism in the naturalist's worldview. While he acknowledges that the naturalist often creates characters who are determined by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance, he perceives in these defeated men and women "a compensating humanistic value . . . which affirms the significance of the individual and his life." So the naturalist, representing the gloomy truths of his nineteenth-century world, yet wants "to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise."[19] The problem in Pizer's approach here is that it is no more concerned with the literary work than Walcutt's: Pizer does not locate in the novel the optimism he strives to define; rather, he locates it in the sort of philosophical generalisations we might make after we have read the last page. Pizer's argument fails to help us recognise more precisely the chief characteristics of naturalism, distinct from other concepts in literature. We may, after all, derive a "compensating humanistic value" from any broadly pessimistic work of art.

We turn now to some examples of the practice of American naturalism in three representative writers. These writers, coming from different classes and regions, vary in many respects, particularly from the point of view of style: Norris and Dreiser, for instance, are irrepressible commentators and speak about their beliefs through authorial assessment; Crane, more like Zola in his authorial objectivity, offers relatively little interpretative advice to the reader.

Nevertheless, the theme of physical force is there in each case, and it is this theme that I wish to describe.

Crane's heroes and heroines are victims. Dreaming confusedly, they reveal their idealism, vulnerability, and innocence, and thus their inability to deal with the demands of the environment that surrounds them. Inevitably, the moral faith and goodness of these characters are defeated by the brute force of physical reality. Animal instincts, ceaseless violence, alcoholic camaraderie, and simple dominance by the most powerful constitute the principal agents of Crane's determinism in tales like Maggie and George's Mother. There is, admittedly, a counter-movement in The Red Badge of Courage, one towards re-affirmation, but nonetheless the experience of its protagonist Henry Fleming discloses a chaotic world beyond the comprehension or control of mere individuals. The war becomes a metaphor for human life and its necessary yet purposeless struggles.

The reader of conventional French naturalism will not be surprised by the story of Maggie, written in the style of grand tawdriness, about a woman or girl at the mercy of her own immitigable passions and the overpowering will of others. Living in the squalor and violence of the slums, she is abandoned by her lover and ends her life in despair. Such is the pattern of Germinie Lacerteux, L'Assommoir, Marthe, and Maggie. But Maggie is all the more pitiable for her ingenuousness and honesty.

A child of the Bowery, her mother and father are both alcoholics and her brother a young ruffian. She meets and becomes mistress of Pete, a bartender, but when she tries to return home after he deserts her she is repulsed, and is compelled to seek her fortune on the streets. She fails as a prostitute and finally casts herself into the East River.

The fight in the opening scene of the novel introduces the reader to the environment of hysterical aggression in which the heroine grows up, vulnerable and innocent. This tribal combat is described with a sensory vividness reminiscent of certain passages from Thérèse Raquin: "circling madly about the heap," "livid with the fury of battle," "furious assault," "convulsed faces," "triumphant savagery," "chronic sneer" (7-8).[20] But unlike anything we find in Zola's tale, there is a suggestion here, and of course throughout Maggie, of positive values, such as courage, duty, and honour. "The honor of Rum Alley" is mentioned in the first sentence. However, the values of Crane's Bowery are revealed to be false, utterly irrelevant to the lives of the characters. That there should be a Victorian sense of morality in the Bowery is surely the central irony of the novel. These people are at least as enslaved by their vaunted ethical piety as by their poverty and misery: they pretend to a belief in respectability and decency, and judge others according to it, but cannot apply it to their own experience. Thus, following the confused standards of his community, Maggie's brother need not concern himself about the girls

he has seduced, yet he must disapprove of the behaviour of his sister's seducer: "Jimmie had an idea that it wasn't common courtesy for a friend to come to one's home and ruin one's sister" (42). Jimmie's sanctimoniousness is only surpassed by that of his mother, a violent drunkard, who casts her sinless daughter from their home in the name of family honour:

> "She's d' devil's own chil', Jimmie," she whispered. "Ah, who could t'ink such a bad girl could grow up in our fambly, Jimmie, me son. Many d' hour I've spent wid dat girl an' tol' her if she ever went on d' streets I'd see her damned. An' after all her bringin' up an' what I tol' her and talked wid her, she goes t' d' bad like a duck t' water." (43)

The first imperative of these denizens of the Bowery is therefore to keep up the public appearance of respectability, to play the rôle of virtuous men and women. That Maggie alone fails to play such a rôle is, of course, her distinction. Emphasising an ironic counterpoint of appearance and reality, ethical code and real behaviour, Crane invests the novel with considerable dramatic dimension. There is probably no better illustration of the extent to which Crane's characters like to deceive themselves than the scene in the theatre where Pete takes Maggie. From the narrator's description of the spectators at this melodrama it seems that they are as much "on stage" as the actors:

> Shady persons in the audience revolted from the pictured villainy of the drama. With untiring zeal they hissed vice and applauded virtue. Unmistakably bad men evinced an apparently sincere admiration for virtue. The loud gallery was overwhelmingly with the unfortunate and oppressed. They encouraged the struggling hero with cries, and jeered the villain, hooting and calling attention to his

> whiskers. When anybody died in the pale-green snow storms, the gallery mourned. They sought out the painted misery and hugged it as akin. (36)

Maggie also rejoices in the triumph and rewards of heroic virtue, but while the rest of the audience sees in that theme a dramatisation of what it takes to be its own conscience, she thinks of the reality of her situation, her poverty and immobility. So Maggie's response is innocent of any histrionic posturing, and it is precisely her innocence in a world of remorseless fatality that brings about her destruction.

Crane's Bowery may be thought of as a microcosm, and his novel a scene in the immense drama of nature where virtue often remains unrewarded. It is no melodrama. Parodying Poe's line from the poem in "Ligeia," we could say that the hero of Maggie, itself "a play of hopes and fears," is the Conqueror Force. Humans such as Pete and Jimmie must embody this deterministic force or be defeated by it like Maggie, who is a product of chance and not "fit" to survive. The men of the Bowery pretend to an honest sense of resignation: with a triumphant disdain for the inevitable they cry, "Ah what d'hell!," yet clearly they expect something from life. The gesture of submission made by Maggie's brother and lover is no more than a dramatic posture adopted to conceal the energy of animal violence which releases itself at any moment. In the rôle of the tough, bellicose truck driver Jimmie shows how much he sees himself as responding to a force of nature, responsible to no one. The one thing he does respect is the superior strength of the fire engine:

"Those leaping horses, striking sparks from the cobbles in their forward lunge, were creatures to be ineffably admired. The clang of the gong pierced his breast like a noise of remembered war" (23). This is the symbol of the instinctive, amoral power to which all human beings are ultimately related through their uncivilised and physical nature.

It is evident that the environment does not figure as the influence that above all makes Jimmie a beast and drives Maggie to suicide. In fact, there is no environment in the novel; that is, no substantial one where independent material things and people alike are informed by a socio-economic reality. In spite of Crane's avowal about Maggie that "the environment is a terrible thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless,"[21] I cannot see the social content which this claim implies. The environmental reality, the society, has little objective existence apart from the narrator himself. The city, for example, ever a pivotal image in the social writers Stendhal and Balzac, is not depicted in explicit detail but exists rather in illuminating suggestiveness, like the city which encloses the Rue de la Goutte d'Or in L'Assommoir. Although, assuredly, moral values have a powerful presence in Maggie, they are, as we have seen, exposed as irrelevant and artificial. Such conventional beliefs are the immediate cause of Maggie's misery and death, yet they only disguise the ultimate cause which is the arbitrary force of nature. Crane's work takes us beyond the social, beyond the critical realism of Hamlin Garland

and the social protest of Upton Sinclair, to a kind of naturalistic vision of the world.

There is a character in one of Crane's short stories, "An Experiment in Luxury," who announces a central principle of American Darwinism: "Nobody is responsible for anything. I wish to Heaven somebody was, and we could all jump on him."[22] The accommodation to literature of the principle of man's and society's irresponsibility and the theme of an omnipotent natural necessity are what connects Crane with Norris and later Dreiser, far more vivid in their portrayal of a resistless determinism. No strenuous advocate of the Spencerian faith in universal human progress, Norris ventures beyond his slightly younger contemporary towards a complete philosophical view of the theatre of nature. In striving to achieve this view and represent it in his fiction he is not always successful, but, unlike Crane, he does make explicit reference to final causes of his characters' behaviour, causes that have a demonstrably physical origin.

As an undergraduate at Berkeley, Norris got his first taste of evolutionism from his science teacher Joseph Le Conte. According to Le Conte's rather over-simplified account of human descent, the brute in man is an essential element for his social struggle towards higher civilisation: it is an ineradicable fact of his composition, driving his desires, needs, and ambitions. Rational social progress depends on keeping the brute in submission. That the brute might,

under certain conditions,usurp the proper place of reason was a thought that fascinated the young Norris and thus found its way into his first important exercises in fiction, McTeague and Vandover and the Brute.[23] These tales of evolution in reverse, as it were, bear comparison with, not to say the influence of, the Zola of Thérèse Raquin and L'Assommoir. The spectacle of Vandover, a victim of lycanthropy, crawling about on all fours illustrates not only the intensity of Norris's awareness of the beast in man and the violence of instinct, but also his enthusiasm for Zola-esque sensationalism.

Unlike Zola, however, Norris never learnt to enrich his naturalistic vision through the use of symbol. One reason for this incapacity is the novelist's lack of interest in the sort of psycho-physical energies peculiar to the individual which are realised in symbol. We have seen such a process of symbolisation at work in Gothic writers, in Poe and Hawthorne, as well as in Zola. So, although Norris does cultivate, especially in his later work, naturalistic metaphors of birth, sex, death, fecundity, germination, and although he favours images of things of staggering dimensions that devour and consume, he clearly conceives of these forces as impersonal and abstract, precisely not peculiar to the individual. In The Octopus, for example, which might have been inspired by readings of Germinal and La Terre, the narrator uses "the Railroad" and "the Wheat" as independent symbols, sufficient in themselves to represent abstract powers.[24]

For all its flaws, its pseudo-epic impression, The Octopus is a remarkable portrayal of the division between, on the one hand, the world of social and economic necessity and, on the other, the formless and undisciplined world of physical nature which presides dispassionately over the lives of men and women. Most of the drama of the novel takes place within the social world where man's will is shown to be far from free: in their struggle against the railroad the ranchers are defeated by non-human power, a power that we come to recognise as supply and demand. Positive moral values, on which the ranchers depend for the validity of their claims, have no effect on the outcome. No one seems finally responsible for the crisis. We are, therefore, confronted by two sorts of external determinism in The Octopus, that of eternal nature, symbolised by the Wheat, and that of the colossal but temporal force of social necessity, symbolised by the Railroad. How do we resolve such a confusion and make sense of this vast novel? A worthwhile approach to the problem, I think, would be to examine Norris's presentation of images of nature and non-human, social necessity, and of the relations of man to them.

Our apprehension of nature in the novel grows through Presley's developing consciousness. At first, the poet-hero's response to the physical environment is, we would judge, naively romantic. Struggling for an epic vision of the relation between man and nature, he sees that the ranchers strive not so much to conquer nature as to live in harmony with it, benefit from its fecundity. They sow their wheat

and it becomes a symbol of such an ideal reconciliation. This is the idea behind Presley's contemplation of the landscape in the first chapter:

> It was the season after the harvest, and the great earth, the mother, after its period of reproduction, its pains of labour, delivered of the fruit of its loins, slept the sleep of exhaustion, the infinite repose of the colossus, benignant, eternal, strong, the nourisher of nations, the feeder of an entire world. (I, 44)[25]

But later, after he becomes involved in the defence of the ranchers' League against the unfair demands of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, Presley has occasion to revise his conception of the way in which man may relate to nature, "the great earth." He is shocked out of his ingenuousness when he hears Magnus Derrick, a man whom he respects, speak casually of making a fortune out of the land. Presley's astonishment precipitates a sober reflection on the true and unromantic attitude of the ranchers to the earth, which they want to subjugate for profit:

> It was in this frame of mind that Magnus and the multitude of other ranchers of whom he was a type, farmed their ranches. They had no love of their land. They were not attached to the soil. . . . To get all there was out of the land, to squeeze it dry, to exhaust it, seemed their policy. (II, 14)

Ironically, the ranchers are shown to have the same disinterestedly opportunistic view of nature as the Railroad, a nature conquerable and marketable.

Unable to form a satisfactory image of men toiling nobly within a benevolent nature, Presley moves towards a belief in nature's

eternal determinism. Near the end of the book he arrives at the doctrine of force--aforce to which, as a vast external power, all things must eventually submit. In Presley's final recognition we witness the statement of Norris's kind of naturalism:

> Men were naught, death was naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed--FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generation, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop. (II, 343)

It is partly through the influence of his friend Vanamee, the mystical shepherd, that the now mature hero attains his very broad vision of the universe. This strange character Vanamee has his own subplot, a sentimental parable, in which he progresses from melancholy despair after the rape and death of his beloved Angèle to joyful vitality in rediscovering her spirit alive in her daughter. Thus he learns, and imparts the message to Presley in the last pages of the novel, that man is no different from the wheat, equally subject to the cycle of life: "Does the grain of wheat, hidden for certain seasons in the dark, die?" he asks his poet friend. "The grain we think is dead <u>resumes again</u>" (II, 344).

Besides the self-renewing, omnipotent force of nature, there is in the work the presence of another fatal energy, the force of society. By "force of society" I mean here not the shaping power of a complex of institutional values such as we find in French realism, related to concrete historical reality, but rather the abstract necessity of human progress, economic and technological. Norris's primary metaphor of this mechanical force is the locomotive,

which leaves an enduring impression on the reader at the end of the first chapter when, with somewhat trite symbolism, it smashes into Vanamee's straying herd of sheep. A few moments after the incident

> Presley saw again, in his imagination, the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, Cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus. (I, 48)

If we refuse to be too much distracted by the verbiage, we might think of a comparison with the locomotive in La Bête humaine. Yet once again it must be observed that Norris' metaphors are of a different symbolic order from Zola's: Jacques Lantier's machine, resembling a barely repressible beast, becomes a figure of his homicidal sexual passion; the locomotive in The Octopus, by contrast, has a status independent of human emotion and gathers its significance as a crushing force from the amoral economic and technological imperatives of the modern world.

At one point in the narrative the resistless forces of society and nature seem to be one. Presley impulsively seeks out Shelgrim, president of the P. & S.W. Railroad, in order to confront him with his inhumanity and responsibility for several deaths. Unexpectedly, Presley finds, instead of a moral monster, a man of compassion, good sense, and honest philosophical conviction: "The Wheat is one force," he announces, "the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them--supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the

whole business" (II, 285). Presley (not to mention the reader) is dumbfounded by this apparently plausible account of the scheme of things, according to which one must "Blame conditions, not men" (ibid.). Were supply and demand an invincible law of nature and nature itself a vast Cyclopean power with a heart of steel? But Shelgrim's argument, with more than a tincture of the fashionable Spencerianism in it, does not survive the hero's subsequent mystical reflections on the place of man in the cosmos. The rousing conclusion of the novel, informed by Vanamee's transcendental faith, confirms the dominance of the natural cycle (birth, death, growth, and decay) over the economic cycle (supply and demand). The suffocation of the Railroad agent S. Behrman by a grey mass of wheat emphasises the victory.

So too does the affirmative note at the very end of The Octopus: "But the WHEAT remained" (II, 360). Norris's broad evolutionary faith urges us to conceive of man as a participant in the eternal scheme of nature, related to it by the fact of his birth and death. This is the only way to make sense of a destiny over which he has no control and which may involve terrible suffering. Norris has been at pains to describe how the Railroad is responsible for the annihilation of the farming community. The human lives in the community may, at a moment of history, be dominated by social, economic, and technological forces; but destructive as these forces are, they are themselves ultimately subject to the determination of nature.[26]

From the evidence of the last couple of pages of The Octopus we can affirm that Norris is on the whole less pessimistic than either of Crane or Dreiser. The forces running through the latter's work are certainly a good deal bleaker and less mystical than, but just as broad as, the naturalistic energies we find in Norris. They have the same effect of reducing man to cosmic insignificance. Dreiser speaks about his principal theme in the following terms:

> I for one would be the last to cast a shadow upon man's dreams or pride, but when one investigates the little we are permitted to know--the darkness the inexplicable confusion, the non-reason in all the things we think, believe, hope for--it would, at least, suggest that aeons must elapse and man himself change radically and develop powers (which, if they are his at all at present, are in embryo) before he could begin to conceive of the significance of even the smallest of the forces which he seems to use but which in reality use him.[27]

To illustrate the weakness of man, "used" by forces, Dreiser, like Crane, situates man in an urban context where free choice barely exists. But although the city pushes him about, it does not ultimately define man: he is already defined by the fact of being human.

More so than his precedessors, however, Dreiser was attracted to the American myth of success. From Sister Carrie to The Bulwark he depicted the many shades of individualism consecrated to the getting of money, power, and fame (but, of course, never wisdom). Given his interest in this peculiarly American theme, it is no wonder that Dreiser should have responded to the influence of Spencer, which in his life was early and radical: one critic, preoccupied with the impact of evolution on the writer's early fiction, has gone as far

as to analyse Sister Carrie in the precise terms of Spencer's First Principles.[28] Spencerian though he may have been in many ways, as a naturalist Dreiser could see how inevitable was failure of one kind or another in a world where mere worldly success is foredoomed by forces beyond society. For, according to Dreiser's philosophical fatalism, man is a relatively feeble species, still barely civilised enough to rule his destiny and yet not quite a beast either.

Early in Sister Carrie, in one of his characteristic homilies, the author attempts to define the evolutionary situation of man as he conceives it:

> Among the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilisation is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason. . . . [Man] is becoming too wise to hearken always to his instincts and desires; he is still too weak to always prevail against them. As a beast, the forces of life aligned him with them; as a man, he has not yet wholly learned to align himself with the forces. (83)[29]

Dreiser evidently wants us to view Carrie in the light of this explanation: "In Carrie--as in how many worldlings do they not?--instinct and reason, desire and understanding, were at war for the mastery. She followed whither her craving led. She was as yet more drawn than she drew" (84). This last sentence should give us a clue to a proper conception of Carrie's "craving," which, as we may judge from her behaviour, is not an appetite inciting action; rather, it seems to be a mere disposition, strong enough to make her dream vaguely of a better life but too weak to promote the intelligence that

would realise it. Thus, caught between instinct and reason, she allows herself to be guided by other people, notably Drouet and Hurstwood. It cannot even be said that she has a conscious power of choice because always the important decisions are made for her and happen to agree with her need for money and comfort: she falls in with Drouet since he has bought her clothes and found her a place to live; she takes up with Hurstwood when she thinks Drouet has left her and her new lover offers her escape from another period of loneliness.

Carrie's character, therefore, is not charged with naturalistic passion; in fact, not by any kind of passion or love. For instance, we are told about her regard for Hurstwood that "There was not great passion in her, but the drift of things and this man's proximity created a semblance of affection" (339). Eternally isolated, unable to establish a vital relation with any other person, Carrie remains devoid of love. We cannot believe, as F.O. Matthiessen does, that Dreiser wants to present a picture of "a woman in love"[30] when the author so clearly proves that for his heroine instinctive desire has less significance than shelter, clothes, and money. Although, admittedly, money may be the most important thing in Carrie's life--"What a thing it was to have. How plenty of it would clear away all these troubles" (74-5)--even it does not fill her with passion, at least not quite Aristide Saccard's passion, which has the energy of physical desire.[31]

For several memorable moments in the career of Hurstwood, an

altogether more interesting figure, money is identified with physical desire--though, again, not of the same Gothic intensity as our previous examples. It is desire accompanied by a sense of guilt that is itself a sort of instinct: "We must remember," warns Dreiser, commenting on Hurstwood's hesitation before stealing his employer's money, "that it may not be a knowledge of right, for no knowledge of right is predicated of the animal's instinctive recoil at evil. Men are still led by instinct before they are regulated by knowledge" (287). So Hurstwood, like Vandover, yields to instinct, the uncivilised part of him, and begins his progressive degeneration. Separated from managerial status, honestly earned money, and middle-class respectability, he descends into torpor and ultimately suicide. When he loses even his animal desire nothing remains for him: "What's the use" (554), he murmurs as he turns on the gas.

Whereas Carrie and Hurstwood vary greatly in their developments through the novel, as between ascent and descent, they are united in their failure. They differ merely in their mode of defeat. Dreiser can comprehend these two divergent experiences within a single theme because of the breadth of his vision--a vision not simply of the vanity of human purposiveness and the physical causes of moral degeneration, but of human beings who are not so developed along the evolutionary scale that they can command their own fate. They belong to nature and the cosmos before society and culture. The same can surely be said of all the fictional characters who have been examined

in this chapter, or, for that matter, of any of the naturalistic characters we have covered thus far: these are people who are essentially related to a vitally mysterious nature. The special sense in which this relation is understood is what distinguishes American naturalism of the turn of the century from the naturalism of Hawthorne and Zola. Less preoccupied with the fatality of flesh, the American writers establish a direct relation between man and an indifferent nature to which, ultimately and eternally, he is subject. Crane alone exhibits a sustained interest in animal instincts, but he does not associate them explicitly with the flesh, leaves them disembodied. For all their differences, Crane, Norris, and Dreiser are at one in their naturalistic perception of an abstract physical force in the universe.

Notes to Chapter Six

1. J.-K. Huysmans, Là-Bas, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: G. Crès, 1928), XII, 6-7.

2. Lars Åhnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (Upsala: A.-B. Lundequistska, 1950).

3. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Lewis Fried, eds., American Literary Naturalism: A Reassessment, Anglistische Forschungen, No. 109 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1975).

4. Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964).

5. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny, Holmes's Works (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1892), V, ix-x.

6. Ibid., x.

7. Donald Pizer, ed., The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 71-2.

8. Malcolm Cowley, "A Natural History of American Naturalism," Kenyon Review, 9 (1947), 414-35.

9. Frank Norris, McTeague: A Story of San Francisco (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1899), p. 32.

10. Leslie Fiedler, of course, sees this avoidance of sex throughout American literature in Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion Books, 1960).

11. Quoted by Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880s (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), p 85. For my discussion of Fiske and evolution I am much indebted to Commager's whole chapter on the subject (pp. 82-90). A more detailed analysis of evolutionary theism may be found in Herbert W. Schneider's A History of American Philosophy (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1946), pp. 321-80.

12. Commager, p. 87.

13. Quoted by Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), p. 18.

14. Quoted by Hofstadter, ibid., pp. 44-5.

15. Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1956), p. 17.

16. Ibid., p. 25.

17. I am aware that since American Literary Naturalism Walcutt has re-affirmed his perception of an optimistic element. See "Sister Carrie: Naturalism or Novel of Manners?," Genre, 1 (1968), 77.

18. Donald Pizer, Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1966), p. 145, n. 2.

19. Ibid., p. 13.

20. Page numbers refer to Volume I of Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, in The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1969).

21. Quoted by Edwin H. Cady, Stephen Crane (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 108.

22. Works of Stephen Crane, VII, 294.

23. For an analysis of Le Conte's influence on Norris's fiction see Donald Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism in Frank Norris's Vandover and the Brute and McTeague," PMLA, 76 (1961), 552-60.

24. Philip Walker reviews the relation between Norris and Zola in "The Octopus and Zola: A New Look," Symposium, 21 (1967), 155-65.

25. Page numbers refer to Frank Norris, The Octopus: A Story of California (New York: Doubleday, 1952).

26. According to Pizer, Norris's concept of nature is less secular than I imply: he sees in it a profound evolutionary theism. See his "Nature in Norris' The Octopus," American Quarterly, 14 (1962), 73-80.

27. Theodore Dreiser, Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub! A Book of the Mystery and Wonder and Terror of Life (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), p. 123.

28. Christopher G. Katope, "Sister Carrie and Spencer's First Principles," American Literature, 41 (1969-70), 64-75.

29. Page numbers refer to Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie, introd. Louis Auchincloss (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1969).

30. F.O. Matthiessen, Theodore Dreiser (New York: Sloane, 1959), p. 73.

31. For an assessment of the rôle of money in Sister Carrie see Philip L. Gerber, "Extreme and Bloody Individualism," in Hakutani and Fried, eds., op. cit., pp. 113-15.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

> Instead of the further conquest of nature, the restoration of nature; instead of the moon, the earth; instead of the occupation of outer space, the creation of inner space . . .
>
> Herbert Marcuse[1]

This study need not end here. It is entirely arguable that the work of other authors deserves to be viewed in a naturalistic perspective. For instance, besides Melville, whom I have already mentioned, there is Thomas Hardy. As a writer of tragedies of fate like Jude the Obscure and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy depicts his human figures surrounded by an everlastingly incomprehensible nature and agonised by the ancient struggle between flesh and spirit. In all his novels Hardy is concerned with one thing under two aspects; not civilisation, nor manners, but the principle of life itself, invisibly realised in humanity as sex, seen visibly in the world as the environment of nature. Moving into the twentieth century, we may recognise certain naturalistic qualities in Thomas Mann, whose physical determinism conceivably descends from that of Hoffmann and Schopenhauer. The presence of sex, disease, and death in the lives of his characters seems to enable them to penetrate through the petrified crust of bourgeois mediocrity and break into a world of vital energy to which they really belong but which they cannot enter without sacrificing their cultural selves in actual

or symbolic death. Even Buddenbrooks, with its realistic social setting, has yet a dimension of psycho-physiological fatality, manifesting itself in the family disease, a sort of hereditary curse.

Further glimpses of a naturalistic vision may be found elsewhere in twentieth-century fiction; but the age of modernism and postmodernism is not, on the whole, inclined to make objective statements about man in the thrall of nature. Artists want to give the aesthetic realm a coherence and meaning unique to it, give it self-sufficiency, which is decidedly not the way romantic, realistic, and naturalistic theory saw it. Turning in upon itself, no longer revolving about human contents, literature becomes style; and, as Ortega stresses, "to stylize means to deform reality, to derealize; style involves dehumanization."[2] Of course, style in naturalistic fiction, the use of symbol and image, does have the effect of distorting the line of reality. Yet in its search to animate nature with physical energy it always so evidently springs from a particular perception of a general human dilemma. The carefully contrived metaphors of the wilderness or forest in Tieck and Hawthorne, of the "beast" in Hoffmann and Zola, of the wheat in Norris, allow us to get a purchase on the naturalistic theme: the problem of man's relation to the natural universe.

Can we not say, then, that nineteenth-century naturalism was the last great attempt in European literature to express this problem? If so, our theme must have capital importance for the history of

Western culture. I think it does. In order to appreciate such importance we should recognise the positive value of the kind of pessimism that underlies all naturalistic creation. This positive value may be hard to find in the texts themselves. Among the works examined in the present study The Scarlet Letter alone offers a suggestion, albeit a rather fanciful one, of the possibility of a human life born into civilisation but not at odds with internal and external nature: the character of Pearl is the one hopeful note of the romance. The hopeful note or positive value of naturalism must reside in a wide generalisation. We can affirm, for example, that the motifs of original sin, fatality of flesh, "première lesion organique," and cosmic necessity, though they bring about defeat or degeneration, may still serve to remind man of the limits to his rationality and the fragility of civilisation. They function as a counterbalance to the career of reason, the principal instrument which man uses in his search to win control over his destiny. In that regard they anticipate psychoanalytic theory: Freud has deepened our awareness of the perils of civilisation's exaltation of reason at the expense of the instincts. Indeed, much of the twentieth-century discourse about man, nature, and civilisation is expressed in the Freudian idiom.

Naturalism, to refer back to the terms of Chapter One above, would oppose the view that technological advance, with its conquest of nature, necessarily liberates mankind. Since this belief persists overwhelmingly today, it is worth conceiving of nineteenth-century

naturalism as a contribution to the modern effort to dethrone science and technology and undermine their hegemony over man and nature. It is well that naturalism should remind us of the eternal presence and power of nature in the world; for in a sense nature, whether in the body or in outer space, has become our enemy, the enemy of science and an affront to our distinctive faculty of reason. Nature is a succession of challenges: we can now cure gonorrhoea but not yet leukaemia, we can now set foot on the moon but not yet on Mars. We who arise from, return to, and are ever surrounded by nature must therefore have primal arrogance to strive against it and be sure of eventually vanquishing it. However, in our attempt to bring nature within the domain of reason we run the risk of denying it altogether; we become like the demonic scientist Rappaccini, a coldly dispassionate man so alienated from nature that he would think little of sacrificing his own daughter's life to the inexorable demands of his research.

The theme of man's fall from the state of nature is a venerable old one which we recognise implicitly or explicitly each time we reflect on the gloomy excesses of the nuclear age, its oppression, violence, and war, its pessimism and latent despair, its vulgarity and intellectual stultification. For all its scientific and social progress modern society may be the most perfectly organised nightmare, a diabolical homage to what has raised man from his original state of nature, his reason.

Notes to Chapter Seven

1. Herbert Marcuse, "The Responsibility of Science," in The Responsibility of Power, ed. L. Krieger and F. Stern (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 443.

2. Jose Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p. 25.

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